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THRICE.

THRICE:

A Nobel.

BY

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London

E. W. ALLEN, 11, AVE MARIA LANE

AND

STATIONERS' HALL COURT, E.C.

1876.

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THRICE.

CHAPTER XX.

PLUNGING.

Who is yon haggard, anxious-looking man,
Touching the passers-by, and asking questions ?
A gambler, risking cash he holds in trust,
A dreadful panic rages in "The House,"
A "strong and sharp rebound" alone can save him,
His clutching fingers seem to pray for it.
What sight more horribly contemptible ?

WILFRID BRINKHURST so thoroughly mastered the business into which he had been forced, that he soon lost the faint interest which he at first took in it; it seemed like continually winning small stakes at that dreariest of gambling games

—*vingt et un*. The dull mechanicality of buying stock and selling it again the next minute, the next hour, the next day, or the next week, at a profit, or even as occasionally happened, at a loss, became dismally irksome; it seemed to him that a calculating machine might almost be made to do the work, and he hated it on that account. Knowing himself to be capable of some much higher occupation, he could not feel content with a calling merely because it brought him in a certain comfortable income, which he feared he would have to go on receiving in spite of himself.

Finding him such an efficient help his father left more and more of the business in his hands, and spent more time in the pursuit of pleasure than he had ever done before, even going to the extent of

keeping a race-horse or two, animals whose maintenance vastly exceeds that of white elephants. Increased expenditure of course required increased income, and Mr Brinkhurst became impatient of the restraint which cautious rules of trading had imposed on him for so many years. He "plunged" heavily in some of the most speculative foreign stocks, and by sheer good luck netted a large amount, which, however, did him little good. A rank outsider won the Derby, and the winnings on yellow Turkish and swarthy Egyptians vanished not exactly into thin air, but into the pockets of other people.

Wilfrid was horrified at his father's reckless purchases; it seemed to him like looking down the barrel of a loaded pistol, pulling the trigger, and trusting

that Providence might have caused a bad cap to be put on the nipple. Of the turf transactions he knew little or nothing, they came under the head of paternal pleasures, with which of course he had no right to interfere, but his protests against excessive business gambling were of no avail. Mr Brinkhurst had great faith in his luck—a most dangerous species of credulity, either in a bookmaker or in a stock-jobber. There were certain stocks which he had a great *penchant* for “bearing,” hundreds and thousands had he made by this very simple process, not suddenly, but at various times, and in the ordinary legitimate way of his trade. Besides the two descriptions of stock in which he had already “plunged” so luckily, he turned his attention to Spanish Passives

—very passive they were, considering the tricks that were daily played with them. Late one afternoon he “beared” them all three, to a very heavy amount—that is to say, he sold several thousand pounds worth of stock which he did not possess, in the hope that their falling would enable him to profit by buying at the lower price on the following day. By reason of some perfectly inadequate cause, several foreign stocks, including yellow Turkish, swarthy Egyptians, and Spanish Passives, went up one, and at the close of the day it became evident that their upward course was not yet finished. Mr Brinkhurst cursed considerably, and went home hoping for the best. Next morning things went higher and still showed an ascending tendency; it happened to be a very fine

but not oppressively hot day, the Stock-Exchange, which is much influenced by weather, was in exuberant spirits. Not so Mr. Brinkhurst; the glass stood at "set-fair," and in view of his large operations he feared to hold on any longer—all his Asiatic and all his European stock he sold at a frightful loss. Account day came, and he had to borrow money to pay his differences, but few people knew how near to being "hammered" had been the old-established firm of Brinkhurst and Co.

Nothing but a large and lucky *coup* could possibly retrieve these heavy losses; in the face of such terrible reverses the old prudent style of business was useless.

The glass still stood at "set-fair" and seemed likely to maintain its position.

Foreign stocks—after receding a little on account of large sales by people anxious to realise their profits—again seemed inclined to rise; deserting his usual tactics, but still adhering to his favourite stocks, Mr Brinkhurst from a “bear,” metamorphosed himself into a “bull,” of cattle-show proportions, and bought largely for the rise. With good luck he would pull back his losses and make a profit; with ill-luck, he must fail and be “hammered.” The weather was all that could be desired by the most exacting “bull,” when some ugly rumours were whispered about, as to the conduct of the Constantinople authorities in having neglected to pay certain overdue coupons; further that a default had occurred in connection with some of the Turkish Treasury Bills.

Intelligence like this could lead but to one result, Turkish fell heavily, giving Egyptians a downward impetus; nor were Spanish exempt from the depression, distrust of one foreign stock seems to beget distrust of others, among that very sensitive portion of mankind which disports itself on the the Stock-Exchange. Unfortunately, too, next morning rain began to fall at about nine o'clock, and continued without intermission during the day, a steady, dreary drizzle; it caught speculators on their way to the City, splashed their neat trousers with black mud, caused their collars, their moustaches, their spirits, and all foreign stocks, to droop dismally. The highly respectable firm of G. Brinkhurst and Co. was ruined—after the next account-day it was “hammered.” The disgrace

was crushing to a man like Mr Brinkhurst; he went home, stayed at home for a day or two, wandering about the house and grounds like one bereft; then he took to his bed, and at the end of seven days incontinently died. The too active pursuit of excitement and continual wine-bibbing had, without doubt, impaired his bodily health, then came the great pressure on the brain. Whether—as may be reasonably supposed—mind was originally the effect of matter, or *vice versa*, when both collapse the wreck is only fit for either burial or cremation.

A drowning man will catch at a straw, and unfortunately for those surrounding him, as a general rule he has no conscience; he will drag down his neighbours, when a moment's reflection would

convince him that—without taking into account the abstract immorality of such conduct—he cannot really benefit himself by so doing.

Mr Brinkhurst completely overwhelmed two or three small men in his fall, and several more experienced heavy losses through him; his death was naturally a severe blow to them, it seemed to be the most essentially unpardonable way of getting out of his difficulties, worse even than managing to smuggle through the Court of Bankruptcy, without giving anyone a right of opposing him. There could be no possible right of appeal against this contemptuous method of treating creditors, many of whom could hardly believe in his death; some of them even went to the extent of proclaiming it to be a sham, and boldly

asserted that he had absconded to Spain, or Mexico, or elsewhere, leaving some less lucky person to be buried in his stead; one *flaneur*—an outside stock-jobber—boldly declared that at 9 p.m. of the day on which Mr Brinkhurst was reported to have died, he had been seen at Charing Cross Railway Station, muffled in a large great coat and a travelling cap, evidently bound for the Continent; and the outsider expressed an opinion that “old B. always was a sharp ’un—deuced sharp trick, by Jove!” Of course the household gods of the delinquent would be sold for the benefit of whom it might concern, but—with all their splendour—what were they among so many? the entire amount including carriages, draft-horses, and race-horses, would barely

pay one half the loss on Turkish stock alone.

The remarks which Mrs Brinkhurst's mother and sisters made on the subject were edifying, if not exactly useful. That they should claim the gift of prophecy, in that they "knew how it must all end," was not extraordinary, but they certainly never gave utterance to their convictions till after the event, perhaps from feelings of good taste ; and it may perhaps have been noticed that similar feelings seem to have influenced prophets in all ages, except when they vaticinated ambiguously.

Mrs Brinkhurst mourned her loss, as wives generally do, even when their husbands have not been models of virtue—in fact, with women, grief for an obnoxious departed one often appears to be

considered in the light of a high moral duty.

The loss of wealth and position affected the bereaved lady comparatively little, they had always been rather too much for her ; coming of a family which liked everything mild, even to their table ale and breakfast bacon, she preferred a slower kind of existence than she had been obliged to lead during her married life, and she looked forward to retirement on her modest settlement of about one hundred and fifty pounds a year with almost as much resignation and contentment as that with which a devout Christian anticipates a posthumous life. A particular friend of her late husband's who had not lost money by him, managed to buy in for her at the sale some few articles which were not too grand

for her new home at Brixton, so that she was not quite devoid of her old surroundings. In her becoming weeds she was one of those interesting but rather languid-looking widows, who seldom either attract or accept a new lord keeper. As for Helen, she accompanied her mother without being a burden to her, some of her rich friends living at Brixton were delighted to have her services as morning governess for their two little girls; having been drilled by their parents into early habits of obedience and good manners, contrary to the usual custom of the present day, the task of teaching them was less penitential than a governess's work usually is. To a girl of Helen's temperament—courageous and energetic—regular employment seemed pleasanter than the

old idle life, when she was often tired of doing nothing; but then she was by no means obliged to earn her living, for there were at least two handsome homes in Fritham waiting to acknowledge her as their mistress, only the owners failed to interest her sufficiently, and Helen Brinkhurst was the last girl in the world to barter her liberty for a whole pantechnicon full of furniture; no doubt, however, the knowledge that she was not obliged to instruct little girls made the work less irksome.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GREAT LORD MAYOR.

It will always be impossible to legislate against the launching of rotten schemes by needy, glib-tongued, unscrupulous promoters, who induce their unsophisticated monied friends to take shares in the most impossible projects, which in about twelve months generally die a natural death; the public lose, the promoters win. They are not the only people who live by the faith of others.

It is almost needless to say that Mr Smith had carefully followed in all the footsteps of his generally correctly informed mentor, except that one closing, helpless step—from the known to the

unknown. Mr Smith had no intention of joining the "majority" if he could by any possibility avoid doing so, while he found such remarkably pleasant company among the minority. He was a man who lived every day of his life, and enjoyed doing so. True, he had lost all his money, but being of a sanguine disposition he felt persuaded that he could easily make some more. The four or five thousand pounds capital beyond the five hundred originally put down was a myth. In common with Mr Brinkhurst he suffered severely from the gambols of yellow Turkish and swarthy Egyptians; but, unlike his friend, he had been just able to pay his differences, and he had paid them, not from any feeling of honesty, but because he thought it would answer his purpose

to do so. Had the entire loss occurred on one settling day there is no doubt that he would have migrated to a warmer clime, with the four or five thousand—product of his five hundred—in his pocket. Unfortunately, things had not occurred as he could have wished. On two successive account days—which, as everybody knows, occur twice a month—he had paid heavy differences, “the third time pays for all,” he thought, but as luck would have it, the third time cleaned him out, and he paid almost his last pound voluntarily.

His credit being pretty good he commenced ordering goods on credit—silks, velvets, and other expensive merchandise—and when he required money he took them to a gentleman in St Mary Axe, named Squelcher, who might have

been mistaken for one of the chosen people if it had not been for his emphatic denial on the subject. His enemies said that he was one of a daily-increasing number of Israelites who seek to efface their nationality by the assumption of Gentile names, by careful shaving, and by other devices, much as a negro would whiten his face and improve his denoting features if he could. Mr Squelcher advanced from one-third to half the value of the goods without asking any questions, and Mr Smith lived by the loss.

This total absence of curiosity on Mr Squelcher's part was a most valuable quality, especially to himself. A great many people in the City of London knew of his existence, and visited him when their financial position became rickety—that is to say, if they decided

on raising money by the very simple method elected by Mr Smith. "Squelcher is not inquisitive," they said, and to Squelcher they went. Sometimes their transactions with that gentleman led to their appearing before the worshipful Lord Mayor in the Justice Room of the Mansion House on a charge of fraudulent bankruptcy; thence they occasionally went for trial to the Middlesex Sessions, and were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Mr Squelcher's name was occasionally mentioned, both at the Mansion House and at the trial, but he went on in the sufficiently even tenor of his way, if not exactly rejoicing aloud, at least not altogether dissatisfied with such a good advertisement. There was a difficulty in bringing the law to bear on him for receiving stolen goods, simply because

the goods were not stolen. So the obtainer received punishment by confinement and low diet, while the receiver remained at large and overfed himself as usual. No doubt some people might wish to transfer a part of Mr Squelcher's freedom to his clients, giving the former the benefit of the latter's frugal fare and confinement; others, again, might desire to put both gentlemen to equal inconvenience. It is unlikely that Justice, with her eyes always bandaged, should be able more distinctly to mark the faint line which separates legal right from legal wrong.

It was perfectly natural that a respectable stockbroker should be found willing to act for Mr David Smith in his speculative purchases and sales of stock, having honestly paid all his losses

and occupying a fair position he was a comparatively desirable customer.

He began operating timidly, and two or three account days found him a loser. The difficulty of continuing to live on his losses for a much longer period stared him in the face; a little luck would set him straight. He gave large orders both for purchases and sales of those stocks which had formerly proved fortunate. With that perversity which the fickle goddess always displays when she is most earnestly solicited, she refused to favour Mr Smith. Nearly everything went in a direction exactly opposite to that required of it, like a pig with a rope tied to its leg, and the balance due to the confiding broker on the following settling-day amounted to £428 odd. On this occasion he trusted

not in vain. It was quite evident to Mr Smith that by becoming a defaulter he would lose all chance of getting his revenge. "The House," having gained all his money, would henceforth close its portals against him, and it occurred to him that this would be as hard as precluding a man from playing *rouge-et-noir* after the bank had drawn nearly all his capital.

Mr Smith came to the conclusion that something must be done, and he did it. He ordered £900 worth of Lyons silks from Messrs Grusam, Boileau, and Co., of Slaughterhouse Court, Cheapside. These gentlemen having heard that some neighbours of theirs had succeeded in selling Mr Smith a small parcel of silks, were naturally anxious to secure a new buyer. Day after day had their

clerk called on Mr Smith obsequiously soliciting his orders, and offering to take his acceptance at three months. As soon as the goods were at his disposal he paid a visit to the office of Mr Squelcher who, without asking any questions, advanced him five hundred and fifty pounds on them, not knowing, as he said when handing the check, "Why he had been so liberal?" This amount was, as usual, euphemistically termed "an advance," and in point of fact a paper really passed, which stated that in case the money should not be returned by a certain day, Mr Squelcher would be at liberty to sell the goods; but no one ever thought of repaying him, and he never pressed them. Mr Smith took £428 odd to his broker, and paid the balance to his account at his banker's.

Part of it he was obliged to muddle away in paying the most pressing of his small debts. He went on speculating in stocks for another month—two accounts—without success. Two of his acceptances, each for one hundred pounds, became due. “Man wants but little here below.” Mr Smith wanted two hundred pounds very particularly, and he could not get them ; it seemed absolutely absurd, nevertheless it was a fact, and facts, as most people know to their cost, are stubborn things. He tried to buy other goods on credit, but subtle rumours had somehow been diffused, and people obstinately refused to sell to him except for cash.

The bills were presented and dishonoured, and the drawer at once proceeded to make him a bankrupt.

Messrs Grusam, Boileau, and Co. saw his name in the *Gazette*, and became frantic. Mr Boileau put his hand to his head with the intention of tearing his hair, forgetting that he had caused it to be cut to a uniform length of half an inch only the day before. He clutched the arm of his partner so violently that it exhibited a black, blue, and green patch on the morrow. Unmindful of everything save the loss of his money, Mr Boileau dragged his partner through the crowds that thronged Cheapside, towards the office of their solicitor, vociferating, gesticulating, shrugging, and anathematising Mr Smith with a richness and variety of language which English cannot boast. Mr Boileau had only recently taken up his residence in England, and retained all his French

impulses. Up the solicitor's stairs went the fat carcase of Mr Boileau, three steps at once. Mr Grusam's being a heavier though leaner body, ascended more slowly, arriving in plenty of time, and Mr Boileau had time to recover his breath before he and his partner were admitted to the lawyer's private room.

"Vat shall ve do?" asked Mr Boileau, in such a shrill, excited voice, that it almost amounted to a screech, elevating his shoulders till they touched his ears, and exposing his palms in order that his solicitor might see that he came there with hands which, if figuratively clean, were unmistakeably dirty.

Mr Grusam then narrated the circumstances.

"I think you had better apply to the Lord Mayor for a warrant," said the

solicitor; "it's a clear case of fraudulently obtaining goods within three months of his bankruptcy."

"Ah! ze Lord Mayor," said Mr Boileau, rising excitedly, seizing his partner's arm, and endeavouring to drag him out. "*Allons*, Grusam, ve go."

Mr Grusam's *vis inertiae* enabled him to retain his seat, and he explained that the lawyer would have to take necessary steps. In the end the warrant was applied for and obtained.

Mr Smith secured the aid of one of the sharpest and shiftiest Jew lawyers in London; but for all the benefit he took thereby he might just as well have employed the mildest Gentile practitioner.

Very faded and woe-begone looked the highly-shaved face of the speculator

in the trying top light at the Justice Room at the Mansion House. Messrs Grusam and Boileau were there, the latter shrugging and gesticulating so violently while his solicitor stated the case, that the Lord Mayor taking him to be a lunatic, and being apprehensive of personal violence, held a whispered consultation with the chief clerk as to the advisability of ordering his removal.

From what could be gathered from Mr Boileau's words and actions, it seemed that he desired to have the accused led out and executed at once in front of the Mansion House, either by hanging or by throat-cutting. Mr Grusam, on the contrary, wished the debtor to live, in order that he might have a chance of paying the money.

Mr Smith's solicitor did all that he

could. That is, he obtained a remand by declaring that he had been so lately instructed that he was not in a position to do justice to his client on that occasion, but that if a remand were granted, he should have some very important evidence to tender at the further hearing of the case, and he was instructed to say that his client had a complete answer to the charge.

The Lord Mayor, in granting a remand, expressed a hope that the charge would not be abandoned, as had been so often the case lately, the machinery of the criminal law not being intended to be put in motion for the recovery of debts; and Mr Smith's legal adviser observed to his client on leaving the Court :

“S’help me ——, if you don’t square it you’ll be committed for trial.”

A somewhat similar apprehension had flashed across the not unappreciative mind of Mr Smith. He felt tolerably certain that he knew of one source whence he could draw the money; but for reasons of his own he had the greatest possible objection to apply to that source; but having to choose between making the application and going to prison, he preferred the former course. Having returned to his office, he wrote a letter as follows:—

“MY DEAR WIFE,—

“Nothing but the most absolute necessity would cause me to let you know that I did not die, but am alive and kicking. I had hoped that, like a sensible woman, you would have married again—as I intend to do when I can get a good chance—feeling sure that

you would never wish to claim me, but I much fear that this letter will prevent your marrying for some time to come; in fact, till an event occurs which I hope is still far distant. I have only resolved on disturbing your peace and quiet because I am in pressing need of one thousand pounds. You may judge how urgent that need is by my troubling you with this letter. You may also be sure that I reckon with great certainty on your being able to get the amount which I must have by next Thursday morning at the latest. Wednesday morning would be better, but Thursday will do. The money can be sent to me through one of the Burchester banks to their London agents. Send me a letter stating that you have done so, and I can then get it.

“You must clearly understand that I can’t possibly do without this money. If I don’t get it the consequences will be most serious to both of us. Send it without fail, and I promise on the word of a gentleman never to trouble you again.”

Instead of signing the letter, David Smith, he affixed the signature “David Sweiper;” and after carefully folding the letter so as to be proof against the curiosity of any local Paul Prys, he closed it with a large red seal, purposely dropping two small “kisses” near it, like satellites to a large planet, and addressed it to Ruth Sweiper, at Stourton Wood. Having sent this letter to the post, Mr Sweiper waited the result with tolerable equanimity.

It has been frequently noted that

those people die early whose departure from the land of the living is a real loss both to their immediate friends and to society in general, while those whose decease is rather desired than otherwise generally live to a considerable age. Mr Sweiper formed a striking exemplification of this latter rule—if rule it be.

Contrary even to the expectation of the San-Francisco doctor, whom the landlady of the house thought fit to summon to the aid of the wounded singer, he managed to muster sufficient energy to hang on to that life which Jews in particular—and Gentiles in general—look upon as the *summum bonum*. The large quantity of spirituous liquors which a long course of practice had enabled him to imbibe without being intoxicated, perhaps assisted his recovery. One set of

doctors would say, "Yes, most decidedly it did," while a smaller section of the most inexact science would pronounce that his strong constitution set the action of the poisonous alcohol at defiance. Be that as it may, what with the combined care of doctor and landlady, Mr Sweiper recovered sufficiently to depart for other climes, leaving the doctor slightly in arrear and the landlady considerably in debt. A not discreditable desire to do justice when inexpensive, would have led Mr Sweiper to divide the money with which he was obliged to part, equally between the two parties. Unfortunately for the landlady, the doctor conscientiously acted up to at least one maxim, viz., "No pay, no attendance."

CHAPTER XXII.

SQUAREING.

Some men ought never to die, others ought never to have lived.

ON the following morning Ruth received the letter. She did not study and re-study the handwriting, the seal, the postmark, &c., after the usual manner of people who receive a letter of which they are uncertain as to the authorship. She had a presentiment of evil, and tore open the envelope as soon as she had satisfied herself that it bore her name.

Ruth Sweiper, *née* Ruthven, was not given to fainting or to tears, either of grief or joy. She seldom gave any outward sign of strong emotion. As soon as she had read the letter through, she put it in her pocket, and sought the earliest possible opportunity for a private interview with the Countess.

In a luxurious boudoir, overlooking the park towards the lodge and the road, sat Countess Trampleasure sipping her coffee and reading a novel. Her nerves were seldom sufficiently strong to enable her to appear in public before twelve o'clock. Ruth was privileged. She merely had to knock before going into her mistress's room.

Taking the letter from her pocket, she said in her usual manner :

“ I have a letter to show your ladyship.”

The Countess took the letter with a frown, certain that it could contain nothing which would give her pleasure.

“Well, I suppose you’ve no wish to go to him,” she said handing back the letter after having read it; “but what makes him think you have so much money?”

“Perhaps he doesn’t think so.”

“I should take no notice of the letter,” said the Countess haughtily.

“But your ladyship has read what he says,” said Ruth, reading from the letter: “‘If I don’t get it the consequences will be most serious to both of us.’ I thought your ladyship might consent to advance the money—that is, if you wish me to remain with you. You’ve no idea what a thoroughly unscrupulous man he is.”

The Countess started slightly, and

resting her forehead on the tips of her white jewel-bedecked fingers, she mused for a second or two, then looking up rather crossly at her handmaid, she inquired, in an injured manner, "How do you think I'm to get this money? I've no private property. How can I ask the Earl to give me a thousand pounds?" Then, after a pause, she added wearily, "there, leave me now. I'll see what can be done. Ruth left the room, and Lady Trampleasure set herself the unpleasant task of determining how she could best obtain a thousand pounds. At first she thought of adopting that time-honoured course, pawning the family jewels, but it occurred to her that the trouble she would have to undergo in procuring paste substitutes would prove too great a strain on her energy.

Asking her husband seemed the only other course, and for want of a better one she was obliged to adopt it.

The Earl was one of those men whose words give very little clue to their thoughts. When his wife asked him for a thousand pounds to be given away to one of her female servants because her husband happened to be a villain who would annoy her, and perhaps cause her to leave her situation, that usually mild nobleman mentally anathematised the pair, but the idea of refusing the money or even of making the slightest fuss about it was quite foreign to his essentially gentlemanly nature. His income was by no means large for an Earl, but he had never been extravagant. He certainly did not like parting with a thousand pounds, although its alienation

might not occasion him any serious self-denial, but he wrote the cheque and handed it to the Countess with as much apparent indifference as though it had been change for a half-sovereign.

Mr. David Sweiper had not miscalculated; he fingered the crisp bank notes on Monday morning, so that he had ample time to "square" Messrs. Grusam, Boileau & Co. before Thursday.

Many men in Mr Sweiper's position would have gone with the full amount of the debt in their hands to the office of that highly respectable firm, requesting them to take the amount and say no more about it; not so Mr Sweiper. He thought ten shillings in the pound a princely composition, much more meritorious, in fact, than twenty shillings in the first instance; and he sighed very

regretfully as he counted and recounted the spotless new notes so soon destined to leave his protection. He felt half inclined to take the thousand pounds intact to some newer country, there to coin a gigantic fortune out of earth oil, or diamonds, or gold, or what not; but London offered irresistible attractions, he had attained a sort of standing there; he knew many people out of whom there was a chance of making money; above all, there was that enticing temple of Plutus, the Stock-Exchange, where men commencing with only the proverbial half-crown in their pockets had made their game with a success which enabled them to retire with a handsome collection comprising some hundreds of thousands of gold coins, and in some instances to resume play and ease them-

selves of their burden with considerably more facility than they had acquired it.

With less than he would possess after satisfying Messrs Grusam, Boileau and Co., had not he, David Smith or Sweiper, realised a handsome sum? Might he not do so again? Replying to his self-questioning with an expressive "rather," he adjusted his hat in his most staid and respectable City style—very different from his evening West-End style—and started for Messrs Grusam, Boileau and Co.'s office with a confident step, and *mens conscia recti*. He was ushered into the private room, and found the two partners looking as grim as statues—that is to say, English outdoor statues—but when Mr Boileau, after various grunts, and shrugs, and pious ejaculations, thoroughly understood that Mr

David Smith had come to pay a very considerable portion of the money due from him, the fat Frenchman put his arms round the neck which he would have so unreservedly lengthened in front of the Mansion House a few days before, and kissed its owner on both blue cheeks with much effusion; then he shook hands with him with both hands.

“I say to Grusam, dis morning,” he said with that sing-song rise and fall of the voice peculiar to many Gauls, “I say to Grusam, I say, David Smiss, I know him better zan you, he will pay, I say. He is honourable, and now he is come. Ah! *mon ami*, I knew it—I was certain; and Mr Boileau again occupied the two hands, both of himself and of Mr Smith, who did not seem to take very kindly to the exercise.

Mr Grusam did not express any intense joy at receiving half, instead of the whole of his debt, but when Mr Boileau had given way to all the emotions he seemed inclined to expend, the less impressionable head of the firm counted the notes, folded them together, and placed them in his cash-box, which he deposited in the safe; he then returned to his seat at the table, and assured Mr Sweiper that no further proceedings would be taken. Mr Boileau again shook hands with his late debtor as he was leaving the room, making profuse offers of fresh parcels of goods as soon as he should have had time to turn himself round, but omitting to say that they would be delivered only in exchange for cash.

On Thursday, when the case came on

for hearing, Messrs Grusam, Boileau and Co.'s solicitor rose, and said that owing to circumstances which had come to the knowledge of his clients since the adjournment, they wished, with his Lordship's permission, to withdraw from the prosecution, &c.,—the common emphemisms which convey the fact that a prosecutor has been "squared."

The Lord Mayor, after the usual protest against putting in motion the criminal machinery of his court for the simple purpose of collecting a debt, proceeded figuratively to wash his hands of the affair with every appearance of regret, perhaps occasioned by a love of abstract justice, or as some ill-natured people might say because the inquiry into a commercial fraud of any magnitude gives more *éclat* to a Chief Magistrate than trying any

number of pickpockets or drunk and disorderlies.

So Mr David Sweiper—or Smith, as he still called himself—left the presence of that far-reaching and incisive “beak” from which he had had such a narrow escape, with full liberty to go on his way rejoicing if he should feel so inclined, affording a striking exemplification of the saying “there is one law for the rich and another for the poor,” a state of things which the poor as well as the rich would be sorry to see altered. If possessions were useless, the action of the earth’s inhabitants would cease; fortunately, however, for the sake of virtue there are some crimes for which money will not atone, such as forgery, murder, housebreaking, and the like. That men should be able to escape the conse-

quences of fraudulently obtaining money by its repayment, is not surprising so long as that questionably useful functionary, a public prosecutor, does not exist. The meaning of the bandage over the eyes of Justice would seem to have a double meaning ; firstly, that she regards not the station of those who are found wanting in her scales ; secondly, that she cannot possibly see, and take cognisance of every fault that is committed. Compounding a felony is highly immoral in the abstract, but it is done almost every day in the week.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FOURTH ESTATE.

What pleasant work to burn the midnight taper
In marking stones and editing a paper !

WILFRID was such a perfect master of his business that it was not difficult for him to find employment at a fair salary. Without loss of time he entered the office of a youthful jobber, aged twenty, named Reginald Wryston, whom he had known for several years at Fritham. The pay was hardly so great as he might have obtained in some large and old-

established firm of stock-brokers, but the situation had the undoubted advantage of being ready to his hand; moreover, he much preferred the position of only clerk. His employer was remarkable as a specially favourable specimen of nineteenth-century forcing, entitled, perhaps, to excite as much admiration or surprise as would a yearling racehorse able to compete successfully with three-year-olds.

When he had hardly reached the age of sixteen he was placed by his father—a Civil Service clerk—in the office of a stock-jobber; there, as factotum, young Reginald—or Raky, as he was generally called—soon learnt all that there was to learn, and pined to play the parts of “bull” and “bear” on his own account; the chief difficulty consisted in

finding three friends sufficiently confiding to become his security for five hundred pounds each.

At eighteen he might have easily passed muster as twenty-five, if only he could have aged his face a little. Herein lay his chief disadvantage, for although his manners and knowledge of the world would have entitled him to be considered twenty-five, his face only gave him credit for about fifteen years of life, and this in spite of all that he could do to the contrary. Of whiskers he could not procure a trace, his cheeks were singularly fluffless, and the tender down on his upper lip only served to make his face look more young and girlish.

When he was only fourteen he had joined the Fritham Cricket Club, and from always associating with men he

soon became a man in almost everything but appearance, on which even manly dissipations seemed to have little effect.

He had seen but twenty-one summers when his father arranged the desired securities, and launched the precocious youth into "the House," a full-blown jobber.

Here he stepped about so briskly that the grass had not a fair chance of growing under his feet. Besides being very sharp, he possessed that special aptitude for pushing which, more than any other quality, interferes with a man being a gentleman. Nevertheless, he was a general favourite among the members, some of whom put him up to "good things;" these, combined with his constant attention to business, which he seemed to enjoy for its own sake,

soon earned for him a good monetary position and a well-furnished house, which he fondly hoped Helen Brinkhurst would one day consent to share with him. Her age exceeded his own by some two or three years, and this disparity naturally increased his ardour, which might perhaps have been somewhat cooled, had he heard her declare that she "would not have the dissipated little wretch if he were made of gold." His size was certainly against him, but so great is the demand for men capable of maintaining a wife genteelly, that he could hardly fail to know there were plenty of well-grown, handsome women, ready to jump at him, even had he been no bigger than General Tom Thumb, or as inconveniently tethered as as one of the Siamese twins.

When people heard that Raky Wryston was going to get married they frowned with astonishment, and asserted in a scared manner, "Why, he's a mere child!" They remembered him a little boy of fourteen or fifteen, and in outward appearance he had altered so little since then that they could hardly believe he had grown much older; still less could those in other walks of life believe that he was in a position to marry.

Time went on, however, but he did not marry; although there were many ladies whom he would have suited, there was only one that would suit him, and she politely rejected him.

Wilfrid Brinkhurst went steadily on in the position of clerk to Raky Wryston, as though stock-jobbing were his beautiful of occupation; employing his leisure

—of which he had a fair share—in writing, simply for the pleasure of it ; laying by the result of his labours, and seldom looking at them. To induce any one to print them, except at the author's expense, seemed an impossibility. .

Being as the late Mr Brinkhurst would have said, “not altogether a bad sort,” knowing his clerk's inclination and believing in his capabilities, Wryston said to him one fine June afternoon, as they walked towards Gracechurch Street to take the omnibus:

“I say, old man, you're so devilish fond of writing, why don't you start a high-class weekly ; sure to pay after a while, I should think?”

“I should like it above everything?” said Wilfrid, “but papers can't be started without money.”

"I didn't say they could, did I, old wiseacre? About how much do you think you could do with?"

"I'm sure I can't say," replied Wilfrid, trying to come to a conclusion from scarcely any *data*.

Taking his large regalia from between his lips, and puffing out a smothering cloud of smoke, Wryston said coolly, but with the air of a man who knows that he is about to make a very acceptable proposition:

"Well, I tell you what I'll do. I've got two hundred and fifty pounds that I've no particular use for; I'll put that down to start a paper. You shall be editor, and we'll share the profits."

"I should be delighted," said Wilfrid, eagerly. It did not occur to him that a considerable time might elapse, during

which the profits would be *nil*, and that his income would, therefore, be only half that amount.

“ I suppose you’ll go in for the Conservative dodge ? ” suggested Wryston.

“ Oh, yes ! I’m nothing if not a Conservative,” replied Wilfrid decisively.

“ Oh ! I don’t care a rap what platform you go on, so long as it isn’t Republicanism, or Working-manism, or anything of that sort. Besides, it wouldn’t pay ; no one believes in the working-man now. In fact, he doesn’t believe in himself, hard as the agitators naturally try to keep up his faith.”

“ There’s one thing, though,” said Wilfrid, “ of which I think the working-man may fairly complain ; and that is at being made to begin work at six o’clock ; it’s too early.”

“Yes, poor devil!” said Wryston, “when I’m arriving at my office at eleven o’clock he’s been at work five hours. I think it’s a case in which grandmotherly legislation is required. It’s all very well to say ‘law of supply and demand,’ but that isn’t always quite enough.”

“No, perhaps not ; it does seem hard, when you come to think of it, but there’s many a poor shop-girl quite as badly off. She gets to work at eight or nine, and stands in an evil-smelling shop for twelve hours, and fourteen or fifteen on Saturdays.”

“Yes, I do pity those poor shop-girls, when I see them stewing in the gas,” said Wryston. “I believe the working-woman’s worse off than the working-man, and the supply of

'em is so great that they dare not strike."

"No, it's a very difficult subject," mused Wilfrid ; "as regards the working-man, I think he's gradually beginning to see that he doesn't differ materially from other men, and that property is not synonymous with theft."

"Just so," assented Wryston patronisingly ; "but whether you make the paper Liberal or Conservative doesn't matter in the least. Liberals and Conservatives are very much alike, specially the Conservatives."

"Ah ! I don't agree with you," said Wilfrid, with an air of quiet conviction ; "look at the series of blunders the Liberals make when they're in office ?"

"Of course they do. Did you ever know any government that didn't make

blunders?" laughed Wryston; "whether the Conservatives make fewer during the same length of office it's impossible to say. As regards the people, I don't believe it makes an atom of difference which lot are in. Each party will make mistakes to the end of the chapter; the only use of their opponents is to act as a check."

"Yes, yes, that's all very well," said Wilfrid, as he climbed up on the roof of the omnibus after Wryston, "the question is which party is the safer for the country. You mark my words; people are tired of Liberal blundering, and when the General Election does come, there'll be a tremendous reaction, and the Conservatives will have a majority."

"They're quite welcome to it," said Wryston, nodding to a friend seated be-

side the driver, "for my part I don't care the value of a brass farthing for either party ; with each when in power there's the same tale of jobbery,—peerages bestowed on men who are too old or too incompetent to be of further use in the Cabinet, unsuitability for offices bestowed, and all the rest of it. I merely feel that the Liberal crew having had it all their own way so long, a change would be decidedly healthy. I dare say other people think somewhat the same, and that's the secret of reaction ; even the English like a change occasionally, so long as it doesn't interfere with order."

By the time the omnibus reached Kennington Church, where Wilfrid alighted, to walk the remainder of the distance to his mother's house, after much discussion as to the appropriateness of such

titles as "The Harrow," "The Billhook," "The Cleaver," "The Grindstone," "The Hatchet," "The Gridiron," "The Pickaxe," and "The Dredge," the latter was selected, on account of its less aggressive character.

The subject interested Wryston so much that he elected to alight and walk with Wilfrid as far as the turning which led to his house, although the distance from that point to Fritham was at least three miles, and luxurious habits had damped the young capitalist's appetite for pedestrianism. When they were fairly *en route* again, Wilfrid said with some diffidence:

"I've very freely undertaken the post of editor, but I'm afraid I know very little about conducting a paper."

"Oh, I can give you a wrinkle or two,"

said Wryston, confidently; "you know Sinkerton, who was 'hammered' about two years ago?"

Wilfrid signified that he had that felicity.

"Well, he's editor and proprietor of the *Blast*. I see him occasionally at Fritham, and he told me how he began to work. You must lay out some money for advertising, and that's the most expensive part; and the worst of it is you can't knock down the price of the daily papers, or any of the best weeklies. But in your own paper of course you'll ask just four times as much as you're ready to take. You might canvass a little yourself to fill the first number; guarantee your circulation at ten thousand, even if it isn't a hundred. They all do it; no one will believe you; any can-

vassers that you employ will be sure to state ten thousand as the minimum, so you mustn't give them the lie."

Wilfrid looked grave; then, after a short pause, he said, musingly:

"It's very humiliating; everyone tells lies in business, from diplomatists to dustmen. I suppose Moore would say the recording angel enters trade lies in a separate ledger, because it's impossible to carry on business without them."

After diligent search, the newly-made editor succeeded in finding an office in a court in Fleet Street sufficiently dissipated in appearance to have satisfied Oliver Goldsmith or Doctor Johnson. Then he proceeded to canvass advertisers for the yet unborn paper—a pursuit in which he met with an amount of discouragement and heart-sickening which

in some temperaments it would have been necessary to counteract by at least a dozen glasses of the best port wine. He had never been used to asking for anything which people might choose to regard in the light of a favour, and the treatment he experienced—though only of the usual sort—galled his proud, reserved spirit extremely. He possessed none of that pushing, never-take-no-for-an-answer sort of disposition, which is born and bred in the children of parents who consider coin the *summum bonum*. Money is almost omnipotent, but it is a consolation to the impecunious to feel that there are at least two things which it will not purchase, good taste and good manners, although of course it does not necessarily follow that all the impecunious are well-mannered. He found it

very difficult even to see the great men who make fortunes out of pills, hair and youth restorers, pomatum, &c., and when he did succeed in seeing the principal or his manager, the reply was almost sure to be, "It isn't our season," or "We've just completed our arrangements," or "We never go into new publications." Some few three-months' orders he managed to obtain, at very low prices, and some at the full scale price; the latter, however, were never paid for. By the time the thirteen or fourteen insertions had appeared, the advertisers had disappeared. At length, after what appeared to Wilfrid a frightful expenditure for advertising, printing, and other items, the first number of the *Dredge* appeared. Although the editor's reason told him that the sale at first

could not be otherwise than small, hope whispered, "perhaps some one or other of the articles will create a sensation, and there'll be a rush for the paper." But the demand for the first number fell below Wilfrid's worst forebodings; it seemed as if the stars in their courses fought against him.

Wryston took a much more common-sense view of the matter. He acquitted the stars of all blame.

"We didn't advertise enough," he said, in reply to Wilfrid's lamentations; "if you sold single sovereigns at a penny each, you wouldn't sell many unless you advertised largely."

This view of the case was by no means consoling to the young editor; he took a fierce dislike to the public, feeling towards them as though they were his

bitterest enemies, who must be fought, and compelled to buy the *Dredge*; but the idea of effecting the desired end by a speculative lavishment of hard cash was extremely annoying.

A bright notion seized him; why not stencil the pavement with the inspiring words, "Read the *Dredge*, price 3d." Any man who might undertake such work would naturally charge for at least five times as many markings as he effected, and even should his sins be brought home to him, the wear and tear of the multitude's feet or the relentlessness of the climate, would afford him excellent loopholes of escape; consequently the expense would be greater than that of good legitimate mediums. If you want a thing done well, do it yourself, thought Wilfrid, and he did it. The system had

its drawbacks, inquisitive policemen sometimes came and inspected the operation, and those of a morose disposition expressed grave doubts as to whether they ought not to 'run him in,' but the judicious administration of a little rum from a case bottle generally set their minds at rest on the point. It was quite an open question whether any punishment could have been inflicted, but it seemed hardly worth while to try and settle the point by passing a night in the cells, perhaps with two or three inebriated females who might do their best to bite his nose off; had the magistrate fined him on the following morning there would have doubtless been a certain pleasure in successfully appealing from his decision; but, on the whole, the game was hardly worth the candle, when

the direct issue could be so easily avoided.

After four nights' experience of this work, from eleven at night till two, it gradually dawned upon the energetic stenciller that his composing and editing powers were rather deteriorated by it, and he came to the conclusion that for advertising one must pay either in purse or person, the latter method being dearest in the end. -

Walking up to Fleet Street one afternoon, Wryston was startled at seeing the advertisements under his feet, but on hearing who had done them, he was amazed at such a penny-wise-and-pound-foolish method. He insisted on lavish expenditure for advertisements in newspapers and other legitimate mediums; as a consequence the second and third

numbers had a much more extensive sale than the first, but the outgoings so greatly exceeded the incomings, that proprietor and editor exclaimed simultaneously—"one or two more such victories and we are lost,—they decreased their expenses and did not achieve further victories; "out of sight out of mind" is especially applicable to a newspaper; if its existence be not continually thrust before the eyes of the public they naturally conclude that it has ceased to exist. Once in his life Reginald Wryston had miscalculated the power of his capital—it was literally nowhere. So the *Dredge* languished because its merits were insufficiently known. Wilfrid became discouraged and out of spirits; he had hoped, almost expected, to make a great sensation by the paper,

but it had fallen dead, a result with which its good or bad qualities had little or nothing to do. He had a dim sort of intuition that the articles written, both by Mr Sparman and by himself, were rather above the ordinary run of such wares, and it seemed intensely galling to be unable to obtain a hearing.

Ever since his removal from Clump-ton Abbots, he had kept up a regular correspondence with his old mentor, and he could not fail to notice the gradually progressive secularisation of the young priest's once fervid mind, as evinced by his letters and by his writings, both of which treated of matters that he would have considered too essentially worldly in the old days.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A NEW PARTNER.

What mortal commoner could act the churl
When sought and courted by an English Earl?

SITTING in his dingy office one sunny morning, straining his thoughts after all sorts of impossible ways of compelling a greater demand for the *Dredge*, the editor was roused from his meditations by an impatient knuckle-rapping on the glass portion of his door. He called out "come in" somewhat savagely, and in walked Earl Trampleasure. His grey

hair and thin grey whiskers harmonised beautifully with the colour of his dark Oxford-mixture frock-coat, which fitted his slim, genteel figure to a nicety, causing him to look less yellow and dyspeptic than in his usual black garments.

“Ah! my young friend,” he said in the most affable manner, walking up to where Wilfrid still sat, and offering his noble hand, “but perhaps you don’t remember me?”

Wilfrid had been so astonished that he even forgot to rise from his seat, but remedying that omission, he took the Earl’s profered hand, and signified that he had much pleasure in remembering its owner, thinking at the same time *que diable allait il faire dans cette galère*.

“I only arrived last night,” said the Earl, gracefully sinking into the wooden

chair which Wilfrid placed for him, then drawing off his faultless dogskins and throwing them into his hat. "I don't come up to town at perfectly regular periods like other people, and sometimes I stop down there at Stourton Wood till I get bucolics on the brain and colic elsewhere."

Wilfrid sniggered a little, as in duty bound; had the words proceeded from a man of his own station in life they probably would not have provoked even a smile.

"A pastoral life's all very well," continued the Earl, "when you're tired of town, and *vice versa*, but really if I were obliged to make absolute choice of one or the other, I think I should choose town. I should come up much oftener but for that frightful railway

journey, and posting looks so ostentatious."

Wilfrid opined that posting must be very pleasant.

"Yes, pleasant enough," assented the Earl, "if it took rather less time; but really, I'm in fear all the time; I'm in the train. I declare if I were only a mechanic, I wouldn't undergo the mere shake of a collision for a million of money, the shock to the nervous system must be something awful;" and the speaker screwed up his eyes as though he were then experiencing the bitter pang, "the effects of it may be felt for a lifetime."

"It's no doubt very injurious; but," suggested Wilfrid deferentially, "I should think the shock of the battle-field must be much worse; and yet old soldiers

who have smelt powder are as tough as any one."

"Ah! there you're wrong!" said the Earl, with a mildly dictatorial wave of the hand, "there you're wrong! When a man is sent into action he fully expects all sorts of shocks; if he gets cut in half by a cannon-ball, he feels that it's all in the way of business, and that he probably won't be divided again; but in a railway accident, the danger of the shake consists in its unexpectedness. I try to guard against the worst effects of a possible accident by continually expecting it. A shake is quite as serious as a wound, shaking a child is a much more severe punishment than beating it."

"Oh! no doubt," assented Wilfrid readily, having a painful recollection of

two or three severe shakings administered by his father for such offences as filling the head of his sister's doll with gunpowder, and igniting it by means of a screw of touch-paper placed in the mouth.

“Yes,” mused the Earl, while he admired the contour of his thin hand, “yes, that is so, doubtless; yes, but what appals me most, whenever I come to London—I say ‘appals’ advisedly—the thing that appals me more than anything else when I come to London is the architecture. I don’t know anything that appals me more than the want of taste displayed in London architecture.”

Wilfrid had never felt similarly appalled, perhaps because he had not sufficiently studied the subject; but he thought “yes,

it might be better,"—a tolerably safe remark to make, and he made it.

"Yes," continued the Earl, "it's truly appalling, even government offices that one would expect to find perfect, always some glaring defect in them, columns on columns or——mind you, I don't say that columns should never be placed on columns, but it ought to be done in a satisfactory way.

"Quite so," said Wilfrid, appearing to feel deeply interested.

"Well, look at the New Post Office," resumed the Earl, pointing towards the office-door, as though the edifice in question stood there, "what could be more hideous than the columns at the main entrance, like a lot of irregular-sized American cheeses piled on each other, looking as though a good push

must necessarily topple them all down."

"Yes, I certainly didn't like the look of them," said Wilfrid, "the first floor—as I should call it—is much better, I think."

"Yes, very fair, but still as a whole it's not what it might have been."

"Don't you think we're improving in churches?" asked Wilfrid, anxious to make an independent remark, and beginning to get rather tired of the Earl's prosing.

"Yes, I've noticed some tolerably good Gothic churches in and about London; but some of them commit the incongruity of having a gallery, which not only entirely spoils the look of a Gothic church, but is unfair to those who have to sit in it, because they reap

the disadvantage of all the exhalations of the ground-floor occupants.

"Ah! I never thought of it in that light," laughed Wilfrid, "but theatres and other places of amusement have galleries."

"Yes, but you're not obliged to attend them—you go there for pleasure; the theory is, that you are bound to go to church, it's a duty.

"That certainly is a distinction," said Wilfrid.

"Yes," continued the Earl reflectively, "London architecture is in a most unsatisfactory condition—look at its Cathedral, for instance!"

"Don't you like St. Paul's?" asked Wilfrid, rather surprised, for he had always heard it spoken of as something grand and imposing.

“Oh! it’s a fine building,” replied the Earl with a shrug, “but the English Church has never been associated with the classic style; religion—a matter of temperament and consequently of climate—can never long survive a change of architecture, which has more to do with worship than many people will allow. I consider that Wren has done more towards the disestablishment of our Church than any other man.”

Wilfrid was about to make some common-place remark, to the effect that he preferred Westminster Abbey to St. Paul’s, when the Earl saved him the trouble by saying, “But don’t imagine I came here for the express purpose of boring you about buildings—no, I called on you because I heard that you were editor of the *Dredge*.”

Wilfrid's face became radiant; that magic name interested him more than all the orders of architecture.

"Yes," continued the Earl, "seeing an advertisement of the *Dredge*, I ordered a number: its uncompromising Conservatism pleased me. I made inquiries, and discovered that you were *fons et origo*. Well, and how do you get on? enormous circulation I hope."

"No, I'm sorry to say," replied Wilfrid, "it seems impossible to make it known without such a heavy expenditure."

"So, I suppose. Well, do you know, I thought there might be some drawback of the kind, and it occurred to me that you might feel inclined to have me as a partner. Lately, the idea of becoming a newspaper proprietor *sub*

rosá has had a sort of fascination for me.”

“I need not say that I should be delighted to have your Lordship as coadjutor, but——”

“But you’d like to think over it,” interrupted the Earl; “quite right—nothing more natural.”

“No, no—not that,” said Wilfrid quickly, annoyed at being misunderstood; “I merely meant to say that I already have a partner who advanced two hundred and fifty pounds to start the paper; but I don’t think he would object to see his money back again.”

“Just so; perhaps you’ll sound him on the subject. I’m quite willing to recoup him, and I’ll find the sinews of war sufficient to enter on

what I hope will be a successful campaign."

The Earl's visit seemed to have infused new life into Wilfrid. He longed, without being able to summon the necessary assurance, to ask after Lady Katherine; the one ray of unattainable brightness in his life, without which it would have been almost unendurable. So he allowed his visitor to shake hands with him and saunter out of the shabby little office door down into the dingy court, without uttering the words that were on the tip of his tongue.

Wilfrid's was an unlustful first love, or rather adoration, of a sort which burns steadily for years without bursting into visible flame, fearing to desecrate or tarnish the pure brightness of its object, by roughly breathing on it; he

might — unless circumstances proved specially favourable—be like the lady who

“Never told her love, but let concealment
Like a worm i’ the bud, feed on her damask cheek.”

With females, who are expected to be much more reticent than males, this extreme modesty may be admirable enough; but to the pushing, restless man, it seems absolutely absurd in one of his own sex. Wryston, for instance, would have pooh-poohed such delicacy, were he ever to hear of it, which was most unlikely. He had “told his love” once, at the earliest possible opportunity, and he meant to tell it again when a favourable chance should offer. “There’s nothing like sticking to ’em,” he had informed Wilfrid on two or three occasions, and he “meant to have another cut in. If

they refuse you once, you may take odds they won't do it twice; and if they do do it twice, it's even betting they won't do it the third time. Let 'em see you mean business, that's the game." Wryston had always acted on these maxims through his short but not sluggish existence, and he confidently expected them to answer his purpose in matters of the heart, because they had stood him in such good stead in his driving, whirling trade. Often had he made a man give him a sixteenth, or even an eighth, simply by "sticking to him."

When he heard of the Earl's proposal, he neither felt nor simulated the slightest grief. He was not coarse or ill-mannered enough to say, "Precious glad I shall be to get shot of it;" but some-

thing of this kind no doubt passed through his mind. Literature was certainly not in his line; he embarked in the speculation partly from that good nature which seems a leading characteristic of gentlemen "in the House;" partly from a desire for patronage, and the possible chance of establishing a paying property. For a long time past the futility of the latter expectation had been unpleasantly apparent; so that when Wilfrid told him that he could be recouped all the money he had spent on the *Dredge*, he praised Providence for having provided such creatures as earls, who not only took an interest in journalistic literature, but who even went to the extent of finding money for its production. "*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*," thought Wyrston, who had culled a few

short Latin quotations from a very limited classical education, “‘Once bit twice shy,’ I’ve travelled out of my business once, and I only escape a loss by the rarest bit of good luck. It’s a caution, certainly.” To Wilfrid, he said:

“Well you know, old fellow, I should have been very glad if we could have done any good together, but I can plainly see that the newspaper trade requires more money than I can afford to put down, so that I really think it’s very lucky that it’s turned out as it has, and—I suppose old Trampleasure won’t be long before he stumps up?”

“I should say not,” replied Wilfrid, rather surprised at the irreverent way of mentioning so august a personage.

And as a fact, he did “stump up” on the following day, when he called at

the *Dredge* office in Fleet Street, and it was arranged that no expense should be spared to bring the paper well before the public. Soon the hoardings in and about London were made to teem with immense posters announcing "The *Dredge*, a weekly Conservative paper, 3d." The shabby office in the squalid court was exchanged for a larger one in Fleet Street; gentlemen of the bill-posting persuasion, of all sorts and sizes, troubled Wilfrid all day long by waiting on him, some in vehicles and some on foot, to solicit orders; men who a few years ago had themselves wielded the paste-brush and rubber, now flashed their diamond-rings in his face as they handed him their lists of "protected street hoardings." Having gone into the business at a favourable season, they

had reaped a rich harvest, and wore part of it on their fingers.

Before a year was out the Earl had invested a considerable amount in retaining the services of these gentlemen, and in paying for some miles of paper for them to stick on the walls, where during rainy seasons it was often as short-lived as the butterfly. The waste seemed almost sinful, but the public is very stubborn, it would not buy till it knew of the paper's existence, and even so apathetic are the general run of people that the *Dredge's* announcement often stared them in the face for months before they even made any inquiry about it, and a much longer period generally elapsed before their curiosity induced them to buy a number, and this consummation having been reached,

it did not follow that that they became regular subscribers.

The smallness of the returns as compared with the largeness of the outlay worried Wilfrid exceedingly, his only consolation being that the Earl seemed to consider it perfectly natural, and stuck manfully—or it might perhaps be more respectful to say noblemanfully—to the enterprise.

Gradually, and long before the *Dredge* became a remunerative property, it achieved a large and influential circulation. From the first page to the last it aspired to be a high-class paper; even the advertisement columns were kept strictly select, rigidly excluding the quack doctor, who drags large sums out of his victims by threats of exposure, or by exciting fears of imaginary maladies.

Announcements of proprietary patent medicines were admitted, as not more obnoxious than any other trade puff. But usurers, either Jew or Gentile—those loathsome bloodsuckers who so carefully weave their webs round vicious youngsters, or those, ignorant or unmindful of the dread rapidity with which compound interest, like a rolling snowball, piles itself up—in vain offered three times the usual price for space in the *Dredge*.

Its writing was always distinguished by originality and good taste ; its political articles, though staunchly Conservative, were not rabidly so ; occasionally they even went to the unorthodox length of lauding a Liberal. No one ever had to sue the *Dredge* for libel, and even its reviews of mediocre novels were not characterised by that savage, intolerant

criticism which seems to be impressed by the idea that every author who challenges its verdict is either a presumptuous fool or a knave. In fine, although the paper was second to none in careful, high-toned analysis of men and measures, of literature and art, it always gave the idea that even when finding fault it endeavoured to choose words which should give as little pain as possible.

Wilfrid knew well enough that the more cutting and cruel the abuse contained in a paper the greater is its sale. A large proportion of the population always enjoys cruel spectacles. Roman emperors who lived a few centuries ago knew this, and Spanish rulers know it now. Wilfrid had far too much self-respect to pander to such tastes. Some

of the divine maxims which his mother taught him when he was a little boy always lingered in his memory : “Do unto others as you would they should do unto you,” was one of them, and he always acted on it.

As the demand for the *Dredge* increased, the editor's duties naturally became heavier, no inconsiderable portion of which consisted in sorting contributions from amateurs, accepting the few and rejecting the many. Then he began to understand why so many of his own articles had been rejected in the old days when he sent them about from place to place, seeking type and finding none. Many of those which he had to “decline with thanks”—for he always returned MSS accompanied by stamps—were quite worthy of print, but if the

paper happened to be full, there was no choice but to return them. Some, although not without merit, were singularly inappropriate to "A Journal of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art." All sorts of prose, and even poetry, found its way into the editor's box.

CHAPTER XXV.

CLASH.

The things we most longed for, often become worthless when attained in circumstances differing from those under which we originally desired them.

ONE beautiful sunshiny day in June, when Fleet Street, by contrast with its dismal appearance in dull, dirty weather, looked almost like a pleasant pasture, an unexpected visitor arrived at the *Dredge* office, in the shape of the Rev. Richard Sparman. He was ushered into the editor's private room, and the friends exchanged a warm greeting.

Wilfrid noticed the peculiarity of the young priest's hair as soon as he removed his hat. It was cut very short all over, and where the crown had been shaved it was rather shorter than the other part; but in a month or two its growth bid fair to obliterate all traces of the tonsure. In his dress there was nothing *outré*; his coat was not extravagantly long, and there was nothing peculiar about his hat, which was not even one of those extremely neat things in broad-brimmed wide-a-wakes—with a piece of black silk cord tied twice round it—so much affected by Anglican ecclesiastics of ritualistic tendencies; in fact, he might have been taken for an ordinary parish parson attached to a church of the Wren and gallery school.

Wilfrid eyed his dear old friend curiously, as well he might. The metamorphosis from extreme high priesthood to mere clergymanhood was complete; even his whiskers, from the dimensions of one inch-and-a-half by one inch, which he used to consider *de rigueur*, had almost developed into the full-sized mutton-chop pattern.

“You see a change in me?” asked Mr Sparman, seating himself.

“Oh, yes! your hair,” replied Wilfrid.

“Yes,” continued Mr Sparman musingly, “since I left you in the Court of Queen’s Bench, without even saying ‘good bye,’ I’ve undergone a considerable change throughout, as you see,” he added smiling; “you’ll think me time-serving, perhaps?”

“That’s about the last quality I

should think of ascribing to you," said Wilfrid cordially.

"Ah! but you don't know all; I've accepted the living of St. Sheeroph Without," said Mr Sparman in a hushed voice, as though rather ashamed of the act.

"St. Sheeroph!" repeated Wilfrid; "it's not a handsome church, is it?"

"Heaven save the mark!" said the newly-made Rector with a rather bitter smile, "but it's highly respectable, and the income is thirteen hundred and fifty pounds."

"I should have thought that the latter advantage would not have been any recommendation to you," said Wilfrid, trying not to give his words a deprecatory emphasis.

"Yes, that's quite true," said Mr

Sparman, looking down; "but I began to feel that I was not exactly respectable at Clumpton Abbots. I had no standing; the Church, of course, could not recognise my position. I began to pine for respectability. It's all very well to pretend to despise it, but I don't believe that any man or woman ever feels comfortable without it; besides, where was such a life tending?—nowhere. At the end of it I should have found the sum-total of my work to consist of making a score or two of men and boys as useless as myself."

"And what is the present programme?" asked Wilfrid smilingly.

"Well, viewed in the abstract it may perhaps be considered just as unsatisfactory; at all events, it will be more pleasant. I shall work steadily in my

profession with a view to rising. I have interest—I might perhaps attain a mitre, and then—why, then, perhaps, I might marry—marry an——”

“Ah, marry!” mused Wilfrid, “the only woman that I would ever marry is——”

“Engaged, perhaps?”

“No, she’s an Earl’s daughter, and I dare not think of her.”

“An Earl’s daughter!” ejaculated Mr Sparman with a deeply-drawn breath; Lady Katherine Trampleasure, I presume?”

“Yes,” said Wilfrid, smiling; “don’t tell me my passion’s hopeless. I know it.”

“But you’ve never breathed it?”

“No, I’ve never had the opportunity, and if I had I should hardly dare to

make use of it; she might refuse me, and her father would be sure to look down on me."

"Then you've firmly determined never to declare yourself," said Mr Sparman, indifferently. He was as good a dissembler as priests and women generally are.

"At present it would, of course, be simply ludicrous for me to do so, but who knows? I might rise; fancy me an M.P.! The Earl's very friendly; he may have a pocket-borough, or, at all events, he probably has sufficient influence to return the man of his choice. Ah! this is mere pleasantry, my destiny is to drudge at the *Dredge* during the term of my natural life—that is, if the paper is lucky enough to last so long."

Half absorbed in his reverie, Wilfrid

did not observe the fixed, pained look which slightly contracted his friend's brow, and made his face look thinner and gaunter than when he entered the room, so short a time before, full of life and spirits, and almost of contentment.

"Ah! marriage is a fearful lottery," he sighed, "and yet a clergyman, like a doctor, is hardly considered respectable without a wife. You see, "he added less seriously, "I'm no longer a priest; I've retrograded or advanced into a clergyman, even in dress. I don't want to alarm the good people of St. Sheeroph; it's no use going into a parish and frightening away your parishioners. I've gauged their minds accurately: they're an exaggerated type of the Old Church party at Fritham. A banner would scare them, incense would choke

them, and a procession would drive them away permanently ; and, after all, such things are not absolutely indispensable."

"You used to think differently at one time," said Wilfrid.

"That's quite true," assented the Rector, "and I feel that I am open to a charge of having changed my opinions to suit my circumstances ; but the fact is I'm older, and I hope wiser. I've had plenty of leisure for reflection at Clumpton Abbots. I'll own I still like all the pretty symbols, and I think they're useful in imbuing the mind with the antiquity of the religion ; if we once make additions, or improvements, or even omissions, we lose our hold on the imagination. Ever since the Puritans were in power, religious feeling in England has been growing weaker and

weaker. It's impossible to produce fervour by appealing solely to the intellect, you must grasp the senses; however, to a certain extent, one must take things as they are; attempts at rapid alterations are useless. I'm appointed to a churchwarden-period church and congregation; it's of no use shocking them. I may, perhaps, be able to organise a choir to lead the singing; later on, I may be able to clothe them in surplices, cassocks never, I fear."

"When you've arrived as far as the surplices I'll come and sing for you," said Wilfrid, as his friend stood up and held out his hand to say "good-bye."

The two shook hands, promised to see each other very often, and Mr Sparman went out into the noisy, busy street, a crushed man. Wilfrid had loved the

beautiful Lady Katherine before him, neither of them had spoken ; but he felt that it would be treason to say a word till his old pupil had either declared his love, or signified his firm determination not to do so. The fine fat living of St. Sheeroph Without, now seemed not only worthless, but an absolute burthen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GATHERING OF THE CLANS.

Some newspapers trade on the delight which the vulgar take in seeing a man or his works abused or held up to ridicule. Before speaking ill of any one, an editor is bound to make himself absolutely certain of the correctness of his accusation, and to use language as sober and as inoffensive as the nature of the case will allow, unless he wishes to pander to those of depraved tastes, whose coin is generally as good as that of their neighbours and more easily secured.

THE *Dredge*, having once obtained a fair hold on the Conservative, and on some of the general public, steadily increased in popularity, till, at two years of age, it was a really paying concern, increasing its circulation week by week; but

for all the apparent good it did to the Conservative party—that is to say, for all the effect it seemed to have towards bringing them into office—it might have been published in another planet. Conversion from one religion to another by the instrumentality of books or of missionaries is not unfrequently heard of, even in this enlightened age; but the man whose political conversion has ever been effected solely by similar means would be an interesting physiological and psychological study. The rarity of such conversions either leads to the inference that man's political are stronger than his religious convictions, or it may be objected that the latter have never been changed by hearing and reading only.

Although the *Dredge* failed to make

converts, it helped to keep up the drooping spirits of its supporters. People read it and approved of its lucid exposition of the blundering career of the Liberal party who, however, continued to blunder with such masterful power, that many hungry young Tories, tired and heartsick of waiting long weary years for the good things which never came, almost felt inclined to entertain the idea of changing their colours. "Providentially"—as they some short time afterwards told themselves—they did not allow the idea to shape itself into words.

In the fulness of time, after the Liberals had succeeded in passing nearly everything that occurred to them, they were defeated on the Irish Education Bill—a measure which they might have

fairly expected to carry with less pains than some of its successful predecessors had cost. Great was the excitement in the Opposition camp. Conservative lords and leaders called together their followers, in the hope and expectation of a fight. Earl Trampleasure gathered a select party round him at Stourton Wood, among the number his particular friend the Marquis of Hillsborough, aged forty-eight, whose hand and title the Earl destined for his daughter.

Lady Katherine had stated, in so many words, that she could never think of the Marquis as a husband; but she had always proved such an obedient daughter that her father considered the matter almost as good as settled.

Wilfrid was asked to make one of

the party, perhaps in order that he might take his cue as to the views to be promulgated in the *Dredge*.

Just before he started, Mr Sparman called at the office to offer his congratulations on the defeat of the Government, and returned to his large dreary house in Sheeroph Square, thinking that if it had not been for his priestly training he should have considered life a vast mistake. Success spoils some, and the utter lack of it spoils others. Here was as good and virtuous a man as ever lived, who all his life had been—so to speak—sat upon. He had been thoroughly worsted each time that he had put himself in opposition to any one, and the much-coveted living of St Sheeroph, which he had accepted with a special object, now seemed valueless,

and he wished that he could go back to St Joseph's, reinspired by his first enthusiasm—a priest with only the Church for a mistress.

The Earl's seat at Stourton Wood was full of guests of all sorts and sizes, from the Marquis of Hillsborough, one of the great temporal mainstays of the Church in the House of Lords, down to—or rather in one sense up to—long Jack Knowser, a clerk in the Civil Service, with red hair, a walk which his friends said he had patented, and who had the reputation of generally being more or less drunk. Like most reputations, it was probably in a great measure undeserved ; for although Mr Knowser could not plead insensibility to the charms of choice vintages, his behaviour and appearance—barring a certain

owly look about the eyes—was as sober and unobtrusive as that of other gentlemen assembled at Stourton Wood.

The Marquis's head was bald, with the exception of the occiput, which nourished a luxuriant crop of rather dark hair; he had a full beard and whiskers, and a large hanging moustache, which quite concealed his mouth; his nose was prominent, much hooked, and very perceptibly askew, insomuch that people looking at him were fascinated by it, and wondered why he had never bought a nose-improver. Altogether he had a most aquiline look, and gave one the idea of a bald-headed eagle, whose beak had received damage in some difficulty with a neighbour.

Wilfrid knew no one, and even Jack Knowser preferred the society of his

betters to that of a mere scribbler, so that being by no means pushing he had a rather dull time of it. A perfect stranger invited to the house would have probably been unable to discover by his own unaided observation that the select company of nobles and commoners had any political object in view. They rode, and fed, and drank, and played billiards, and went to bed, just as though the nation's fate did not depend on them. Certainly at dinner they took a dash of politics with their soup, and a slight sprinkling of them with the entrées, but hardly to a greater extent than might have been expected at any other gentleman's table; and although among the smaller men there were some who hoped and anticipated that their party would at once go into

office and distribute some of the good things among its devoted followers, the bigger men—although they might not say so in as many words—were decidedly of opinion that their chief would not accept the reins of government till he had a good working majority in the House,—a consummation which could hardly be arrived at without a dissolution.

“And a dissolution we shall have, too, before long, mark my words,” said Mr Singerton, a hoary-headed old member, as soon as he had filled his first glass of tawny port.

All dinner-time not a word had escaped his lips, the food being so superior to what was generally provided for him at his own house, that he considered conversation would have been a most reprehensible waste of time.

“I quite agree with you,” said a greasy-looking, thick-lipped, iron-grey gentleman, who had developed from a Jew into a Conservative M.P. with such completeness that only acute physiognomists knew him to be an Oriental; the English climate had done much for his ancestors, and as his name was Mosson most people took him for an Englishman.

“I quite agree with you, sir,” he repeated, eating grapes with great rapidity, not to say greediness; “we shall be in before six months are out. They can’t possibly last longer.”

“Everyone’s getting tired of them,” said a stout, red-faced Lord of the Manor, in a tall stock, small shirt-collar, and very deep coat-collar, “they can’t hold on much longer; they’ve offended the publicans.”

“Great is the god Beer! he shall avenge us!” said Sir George Juggleton, an old landed proprietor, whose pink face formed a pleasing contrast to his perfectly white whiskers, which were kept carefully clipped to the length of not more than half-an-inch, giving the idea of best isinglass chopped into short lengths and gummed on to his cheeks, while his chin and upper lip were so beautifully shaved that it might have been thought hair had never grown there.

“The army won’t forget ’em, either,” said Colonel Dolboy, nearly choking himself with a fierce gulp of Madeira, and growing purple from the combined effects of ire, rich meats, and wine, principally the two latter, for the Colonel was one of the old school, and considered that he had not dined until he

had both eaten and drunk to coughing point; and then, having ill-used his stomach, he complained of his lungs, an error into which a large number of good fellows besides Colonel Dolboy will continue to fall for several years to come, much to the profit of the doctors, many of whom do not differ from their patients in apparently being of opinion that digestion is performed vicariously.

“Yes, sir,” continued the Colonel, recovering his powers of speech and his normal colour with some difficulty, “you may safely take your oath the army won’t forget ’em when the time comes.” No one having expressed a desire to be sworn to that effect, he resumed, “A pretty thing, indeed ! instead of officers and gentlemen, you’ll have an army officered by cads, fellows who can’t

even pay their share towards a decent mess—bah! the service is going to the dogs, sir; fellows won't join if they stand a chance of having the village blacksmith for their superior officer, no—no, no, this is the blessing of having a Liberal government.”

“The system works well in Prussia, Colonel,” suggested Mr Mosson, whose “Colonel” had a decided tendency to become “curdle.”

“So it may, so it may, sir; but Prussia isn't England.

“That's very true, Colonel,” said Mr Mosson, “but I think you've mistaken the probable effects of the Bill; it doesn't give the ranks any better chance of commissions than they had before, it merely provides against a man having a step bought over his head.”

“Ah!—oh!” grunted the Colonel, “then what on earth did they want to meddle for? Why not let well alone? it had lasted all these years. Bah! Liberal government, indeed, a devilish deal too liberal, in giving away what no one wants.”

“Just so, just so, Colonel; I quite agree with you,” assented Mr Mosson, quartering his second large orange.

“Did anyone thank them for reducing the duties on coffee and sugar?” asked the Colonel savagely—“not a bit of it. Who gets the benefit? why, the grocers; besides, the things were cheap enough before. Nobody complained. They’d much better have taken off the income-tax.”

“Of course they might,” joined in the Marquis of Hillsborough, “but that wasn’t their policy; they wanted to

tickle the working-man, the working-man doesn't pay income-tax. What is the income-tax to him, or he to the income-tax? do you think he'll be grateful, Trampleasure?"

"That remains to be seen," replied the Earl, who seldom talked much at his own table—or at anyone else's, for that matter.

"Yes, it also remains to be seen whether much gratitude will be felt by those Irish whom the disestablishment of the State Church is supposed to affect."

"Very little, I think," said the Earl; "it's very difficult to do 'justice to Ireland,' and the first step towards it means the release of those interesting criminals, the Fenians."

At this remark everyone laughed, or

grinned, or merely showed his teeth, or sniggered, or chuckled, in the manner peculiar to him.

“And how soon do you think of disestablishing the English Church, Marquis?” asked Mr Mosson, still showing his white teeth.

“I’m surprised at such a question,” replied the Marquis coldly, and with some *hauteur*. “I thought that everyone knew that I have defended and upheld the Establishment as it stands, on every possible occasion.”

“Quite so, Marquis; but your Lordship’s private opinions being so well known, I——”

“I really don’t see that my private opinions have anything to do with it,” interrupted the Marquis; “the Church of England employs a large number of

hands, it's useful in that respect ; if you pull it down what are you going to put up in it's stead, the nation is neither enlightened enough nor virtuous enough to do without any religion at all. The Establishment, at least, has the merit of being thoroughly respectable, and it does no harm to anyone."

"Quite so, quite so !" said Mr Mosson, obsequiously.

"I take it that the Church of England is now in a parallel state to that in which the old Roman Paganism found itself at the beginning of the Christian era," said the Marquis, insensibly lapsing into his House-of-Lords style and tone, as some clergymen, when making an after-dinner or after-supper speech, unconsciously, or perhaps involuntarily, adopt the laboured cadences of their pulpit

sing-song; "no educated Roman believed in Jupiter, and Juno, and all the rest of the immoral group; the women had faith, they always have had, and always will have. It was, of course, to the interest of the priests to nurse and keep up that faith."

"Yes, by Jove!" said Jack Knowser, with that peculiar twitch of the mouth and half wink of the eye which generally saved him the trouble of laughing, "they weren't particular how they worked the oracle, so that they did work it—talking head, and that sort of game—same style of business as the winking virgin; but I believe it doesn't pay so well as it used to."

"No, of course not," said the Marquis, looking quite over Jack Knowser's tall head, "that sort of thing naturally

wears itself out in time. If you try to abolish it, it lasts the longer; besides, you're bound to put something better in its place, which you can't do at short notice. My answer to the Liberationists is, 'What harm has it done you?' The supernatural part of it will die out in course of time, from a general decrease of faith; and when that consummation is reached, religion will hardly provide a means of livelihood to any set; and as the money is the real bone of contention, we shall be more Christianlike when Christianity has ceased."

"Should it die by natural causes I can quite understand that what you describe may happen," said Earl Templemore; "but I'm afraid that very complicated machine—the great Liberal party—will not allow it to die unaided."

Jack Knowser regarded space with a more owly look than usual; probably for two reasons, viz., the depth of the subject and the strength of the wines.

Mr Mosson thought that Judaism, having given birth to Christianity, would most likely outlast its offspring; but he did not say so.

Colonel Dolboy wondered whether it would ever be possible to do without a standing army, and came to the conclusion that it would last his time.

Having taken much more wine than was good for them, but vastly less than their fathers would have drunk under similar circumstances—not sufficient, in fact, to affect their heads in any marked degree, the men joined the ladies in the exquisitely decorated drawing room. Looking-glasses enlivened the room where-

ever there was an excuse for placing one, the Earl's opinion being that mirrors are to a room what lakes are to a landscape.

The Countess had a prejudice on the subject. She enjoyed seeing the reflection of her handsome figure in her own house, but she fancied that the glasses of her friends were endowed with the malicious power of doing her face injustice. She therefore always kept her eyes carefully from them. As to the effect, she was no doubt correct, but, as a woman, she exercised her undoubted right of discovering the wrong cause. Mild emetics, in the shape of hot tea and coffee, were brought round, and when some of the company had been irrational enough to drink, Wilfrid found himself walking in the conservatory with Jack

Knowser, who remarked after some minutes' silence :

“Infernal old impostor that Marquis of Hillsborough ! Fancy his marrying a girl like Lady Katherine ! Why, dash it ! I'd sooner marry her myself, though she isn't my style.”

Seeing Sir George Juggleton at a short distance, Knowser rushed off and button-holed him, without waiting to hear any comment from Wilfrid, who chewed the cud of bitter reflection long after he had made his impression on the luxurious Trampleasure 'bed. Although it was quite clear to him that he could not fairly hope or expect ever to have more than a bare speaking acquaintance with an Earl's daughter, still he could not help feeling it to be a severe and difficult-to-be-borne trial, that the only woman

who ever had, or who ever could inspire him with a sense of love and devotion should be almost as unattainable as the bright star looking at him through the Venetian blind.

To worship her through life at a distance might have been a certain consolation had she remained single, but the idea of her marriage with a man of the Marquis's age, and so utterly unsuited to her with regard to opinions on things in general, and on religion in particular, seemed a horrid desecration of the sacred image of the saint so deeply enshrined in his heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NOT STRONG ENOUGH.

We often believe a statement simply because it is made ; we should on that account incline to disbelieve it, if, as the Psalmist says, " all men are liars."

It was not the season for England's *élite* to amuse themselves by the slaughter of any highly-esteemed animal ; so next morning most of the guests either rode, or drove, or walked, except a few who thought that the beauty of the splendid summer weather would render some of the rabbits, if not exactly desirous of being put to death, at least contented

to suffer a certain amount of pain and inconvenience in order to afford the lords of the creation a fair running mark for their double barrels.

Wilfrid wandered about the grounds purposeless. Even the comfortable position of the sun was powerless to cheer him; clouds, green leaves, flowers—the very stones looked joyously beautiful in the cheerful sunshine; but his perfect ideal had been dethroned—destroyed, and the mere light and warmth of a large fire, though it might burn never so brightly in the heavens, was powerless to comfort him.

Wandering about the kitchen-garden, barely noticing the luxuriant fruits and vegetables, he presently came to its most remote corner, and found himself entering the filbert avenue. The light yellow-

green of the blossom formed a pleasing contrast to the darker foliage of the leaves; the whole enlivened by the bright, but not too glaring sun, recalled the remembrance of a wood scene on the stage, with lime-light effects, only it was much more mellow and more soothing to look on.

Acknowledging to himself the calm beauty of the nook, after a hasty glance along its length, Wilfrid took from his pocket a diamond edition of Wordsworth, and began slowly reading while he slowly walked through the avenue. He had gone rather more than half-way, quite absorbed and steeped above his ears in the poetry which seemed more calming than any other, when he raised his eyes and saw Lady Katherine barely three yards off, sauntering along intent

on a book she held in her hand. She looked up at the same moment, and they both started.

Lady Katherine smiled and blushed slightly. The subdued light made her more intoxicatingly beautiful than Wilfrid had ever seen her look before.

For a moment her extreme loveliness took away his senses, and then he steeled himself against it, remembering that she was engaged to be married to a man not only nearly old enough to be her father, but to one who in private life was an Atheist, while she professed Christianity in its utmost strictness.

“Studying deeply?” said Lady Katherine; “may I ask the subject?”

“Wordsworth,” replied Wilfrid, without looking at his questioner.

“How strange!” she said, holding her

book so that Wilfrid could see that it was the same author; "no other poet pleases me so much. He seems to express my exact sentiments, only in language infinitely superior to anything I could ever hope to attain."

"Yes, it's very beautiful," said Wilfrid reflectively, looking at the open book without seeing a word of it.

"You have little time for reading poetry now, I suppose. The *Dredge* must take up nearly all your time?"

"No, I have very little time," said Wilfrid, still intently looking at the book.

"Ah!" sighed Lady Katherine, I should like nothing better than to conduct a newspaper,—a weekly, not a daily; the hurry would be too great. I envy the power of making one's opi-

nions heard and felt. But to a woman it's impossible," she added somewhat sadly.

"No, it can never be looked upon as woman's work," said Wilfrid gravely.

After a little pause, closing her book and looking on the ground, Lady Katherine said with half a sigh, "it seems ages ago since I first saw you at Clumpton Abbots."

"Yes, things have altered much since then," said Wilfrid, mournfully, fancying he detected in the speaker's tone a faint tinge of remorse.

"You're not sorry that you ceased to be a monk, I suppose?"

"No, perhaps my removal was all for the best,—who can tell?"

Lady Katherine seemed to ponder the question for a moment or two, and then

she said smilingly, "I have to congratulate you on your successful editorship. Papa tells me that the *Dredge* is quite powerful, and much sought after."

"Thanks," said Wilfrid lowering his eyes; and I believe I have to congratulate you on your approaching—— that is——"

"Congratulate me?—on what, pray?" asked Lady Katherine, her colour deepening and her eyes flashing as Wilfrid thought they never could flash.

"On your approaching marriage," replied Wilfrid, looking at her in spite of himself.

"Marriage! to whom?" asked Lady Katherine, impatiently, and with what almost appeared to be a slight stamp of her foot.

"The Marquis of Hillsborough," said

Wilfrid timidly, and feeling regret at having somehow pained the woman whom he had so worshipped.

“Who told you?” she asked with set teeth, and clenching her hand in a way which boded ill for the informant had he been present.

Wilfrid’s first impulse was to give the offender up to justice, but he thought better of it, and feeling by this time thoroughly cowed, and unaccountably ashamed of himself, he said hesitatingly, “I heard it casually mentioned yesterday.”

“And you believed it?” said Lady Katherine sadly; her whole frame seemed to relax, as though she felt humiliated at having allowed her animal nature to get the better of her. “The Marquis is, no doubt, a man much to be respected as

regards his public life, but sooner than marry him I'd be torn limb from limb, or nailed upon a cross, or suffer any humiliation; to be united to a man who deliberately disbelieves in God and a hereafter would be to me worse than a thousand deaths." Her heart seemed to leap to her mouth and almost to choke her utterance; the words evidently came from her inmost soul. Wilfrid had always thought her cold, and hardly to be stirred by deep emotions; but he now saw that to bring out the glorious harmonies of her inmost nature, it was only necessary to strike the right chord, and he felt the cruelty of that impassable gulf "caste," which figures so conspicuously on the map of society, with greater keenness than ever.

With Wordsworth pressed against his

mouth he stood undecided what to do or say ; to apologise would be like taking upon himself the blame of another man's carelessness, and yet he felt a wish to make some sort of amends for the annoyance he had caused. Catching sight of a small black and white caterpillar hanging from a leaf by its silken thread, he stood staring at it, as if fascinated, for what seemed to him more than a minute. At length he said with an effort "I—I ought not to have believed it, even the little I have seen of you should have told me it was false, but taken unawares one sometimes believes things—merely because they are stated—which a moment's reflection would——"

"Oh ! pray don't take it to heart so much," said Lady Katherine smiling, and quite recovering her usual manner,

“it was not unnatural that you should believe what you heard stated as a fact.”

The caterpillar had dropped down out of sight, so Wilfrid transferred his attention to the toecap of his boot; he felt that if he spoke at that moment his words would be warmer than his position warranted. Luckily, Lady Katherine relieved his embarrassment by looking at her little watch, and saying, “twelve o’clock; I must run away to see a poor woman in the last stage of consumption, she always expects me about this time,” and then holding out her hand, she added, “excuse my ill-temper; I don’t often give way to it?”

Wilfrid took the hand, but speech failed him, and Lady Katherine glided swiftly away. Looking longingly after her, he

was not too absorbed in thought to notice that her boots were wanting in those high heels which make walking an exercise not only unattractive as an exhibition, but painful to perform; and the graceful ease of her movements made it evident that she was quite unburthened by a "figure improver" of any sort.

For a few moments he stood motionless, recalling each sentence she had uttered and the look that had accompanied it; and although he tried to stifle the idea, as savouring of coxcombry, he could not help fancying she evinced an interest in him that delicate wooing could soon have ripened into love, had their stations been more equal; but the bare thought of such a thing seemed like treason, for although strictly speak-

ing the Earl could hardly be considered to have done him a favour, still, he felt convinced in his own mind that but for the kindly interest taken in him by his noble coadjutor the *Dredge* would have probably been numbered among the defunct long ago.

Retracing his steps towards the end of the avenue at which he entered, he met the Earl slowly puffing a freshly-lighted cigar, "Ah! it's all 'over,'" he said smiling.

Wilfrid, without speaking, looked at him for an explanation, thinking that he must be alluding to Lady Katherine.

"No, I've just had a telegram; we shan't go in this time," said the Earl without noticing Wilfrid's look of inquiry; "but they can't last long, and if there's an appeal to the country, I feel

pretty certain that we shall rather astonish their weak minds."

That same afternoon Wilfrid, bag in hand, left Stourton Wood for the railway-station, three miles distant, to catch the three-o'clock train, preferring the beautiful shady walk to the fuss of being driven there in one of the Earl's well-known vehicles.

He had gone about a mile, when he met Lady Katherine with a pretty basket on her arm, and wearing a gipsy Leghorn hat trimmed with field flowers; she looked bewitching enough to make any man forget his reserve. Wilfrid was doubting whether to merely raise his hat and pass on, or whether it would be more correct to stop and announce his departure, when Lady Katherine saved him the trouble of arriving at a

decision by halting and asking laughingly, "What, tired of Stourton Wood already, I'm afraid you find it dull after the gay busy life in town."

"Stourton Wood is a beautiful place, where a man might well be content to end his days," said Wilfrid gravely, "but for me there's no choice, having certain work to do, I must do it."

"Yes," said Lady Katherine, reflectively, "that is so; and I should think that those who have to earn their living by a profession in which they take a pride and an interest are happier and more contented than those who have nothing but their amusement for occupation."

"Oh, yes! I quite agree with you," said Wilfrid, enthusiastically. "I wouldn't exchange my employment for an independent income."

“Ah! I almost envy you—a woman has such a narrow choice of employment; she must either visit the poor or write novels. Of the latter I don’t much approve, and as regards the former, although there’s a satisfaction in being of use to one’s poorer fellow-creatures, it’s hardly soul-filling enough by itself to satisfy for a lifetime.”

“Yes, and you must often find that you’ve been giving to people who have no absolute need, the really deserving poor refuse to be discovered.”

“It’s impossible to avoid being imposed on sometimes, but I never feel any resentment against the impostors.”

“That’s very Christian-like,” said Wilfrid, smiling, “with certain reservation, there’s considerable truth in Butler’s well-worn maxim,

“Doubt less the pleasure is as great,
In being cheated as to cheat.”

It's not everyone who undergoes the operation with cheerfulness; to thoroughly enjoy it one must largely possess the virtue of toleration.”

“You're quite a philosopher,” said Lady Katherine, with a merry laugh.

“That's my trade,” said Wilfrid, quite forgetting that trains—like policemen—are generally to time when they are not wanted.

“The idea of calling it a trade!” said Lady Katherine; “one would think you were a grocer or a cheesemonger.”

“Perhaps I'm nearly as bad. I don't suppose my articles are more genuine than theirs.”

“Confessing a fault is half way towards mending it; but I shall keep you

talking here till you lose your train. You'll forgive my ill-temper this morning," she added winningly, as she offered her hand. Wilfrid held the hand for a second or two, bowed, turned hurriedly, and went on his way treading as if on air, and running after he had walked a few steps, although he knew there was ample time.

During half the journey the noise and rattle of the carriage kept jolting and hammering into his head, the one idea that Lady Katherine liked him and might be won, the bare idea seeming like a ray of celestial happiness; then the continual drumming on the brain of one idea, and the physical fatigue produced by two hours of din and whirl caused a reaction, and he felt utterly without hope that his unspoken love

could ever be otherwise than a curse to him. That Wilfrid Brinkhurst, the son of a stockjobber, should marry an Earl's daughter seemed absurd, and he arrived at his mother's house tired and depressed in the extreme.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COMPARING NOTES.

To unregenerate man how great the trial
Is that angelic virtue—self-denial !
But harder still to practise it unbidden,
And unproclaimed to keep the effort hidden.

THE next morning was so fine that hardly any one could feel melancholy, except such unfortunates as were expecting to be detected in some grievous crime, or those who were in hourly anticipation of a distress for rent. As Wilfrid was carried swiftly up to town on the box-seat of a well-appointed om-

nibus, behind four good horses, everything looked beautiful in the summer sun—the glittering harness and the shining coats of the team, the prim stuccoed villas, with neat fresh-looking servant-girls, shaking their dusters out of the upper windows, even the obtrusive shop windows undergoing the process of being laid out, looked cheerful and pleasing to the eye in the white, bright morning light; the walk up Cheapside and along Fleet Street was really a pleasure, despite the roar and bustle; and when he arrived at the office and learnt from his clerk that Mr Sparman had called on the previous day to inquire whether he had returned from Stourton Wood, it recalled the peaceful days at Clumpton Abbots—which, however he could now look back on without

regret—and life altogether seemed well-worth living.

He had hardly been in the office half-an hour when Mr Sparman came in, looking more gaunt and haggard than usual. His hair, which he wore so very short that it required cutting at least once a fortnight, looked dry and spiky, as though it had not passed through the hands of his specially-appointed barber for at least a month; his inch whiskers, although they had not been allowed to extend down the cheek, had considerably increased in length, so that they somewhat resembled what are known in the trade as “Piccadilly droopers,” much dwarfed; his general appearance brought forcibly to Wilfrid’s recollection the “Jackdaw of Rheims” after it had been elaborately cursed by the Lord Cardinal.

The junior clerk had no sooner ushered the Reverend Richard into the editor's private room, than the young scapegrace remarked to his senior, who was casting up columns of figures in a neatly-bound ledger: "He looks as if he'd dropped a sixpence and picked up a fourpenny-bit." A remark which obliged the young man to whom it was made to recommence casting the long row of figures, and obtained for the utterer an anathema and a buffet.

Mr Sparman sat down in the chair placed for him with the air of a man not thoroughly aware of his own movements, and he allowed his hat to remain on his head till he had been conversing some few minutes; then he removed it and put it on

the table as though it had been to blame.

“You’re not well?” said Wilfrid, noticing his friend’s haggard look.

“Yes, I’m well enough,” said Mr Sparman, in a manner which seemed to denote that he rather resented his healthy state ; “but I feel altogether out of my element. Up late last night, too,” he added, passing his hand slowly over his forehead and eyes.

“That’s quite a new vice,” remarked Wilfrid.

“Yes, I feel like—I don’t know what. It makes me unfit for anything ; but what could I do ? My parishioners invited me to meet them at the London Tavern—over a hundred and fifty of them—with their wives and daughters gorgeously arrayed ; a dance and sup-

per. They did the dancing, and I did the looking on ; button-holed first by one, then by another ; dragged this way to be introduced to this man's wife, then carried off in another direction to be introduced to that man's daughter ; then whole files of them marching past and shaking hands with me."

"You'll soon be known as the 'popular parson,' " laughed Wilfrid.

Mr Sparman performed a sickly smile.

"Ah!" he sighed, "it's no laughing matter. Of course I must invite them all in return, or at least the bulk of them."

"Well, you've got a large house," suggested Wilfrid.

"Yes, but how could I amuse them? It was bad enough to be their guest, but to be their host——"

“You must invite some choir, and do some glees and madrigals. That’s sure to please. You’ll give a maximum of entertainment with a minimum of trouble.”

“Ah, yes!” said Mr Sparman reflectively, “I suppose something of that sort would suit as well as anything. I was afraid I should have to see them dance again; an exhibition I detest. To see people walk through a quadrille, and appear to enjoy it, is to me absolutely sickening. I can understand the pleasure either of seeing or performing some dance requiring strength and dexterity, but the ordinary ball-room evolutions are tame in the extreme. The ladies, of course, can’t be expected to dance in their unwieldy dresses.”

“I must say I like a good dance,”

said Wilfrid, thinking of a partner with whom to waltz would be Elysium.

"Everyone to his liking," said Mr Sparman with a shrug; "will you come and help me with the singing?"

Wilfrid assented, and Mr Sparman gradually drew from him the particulars of his conversation with Lady Katherine, extracting therefrom but scant comfort, and he took his leave, looking even gaunter than when he entered.

"Why don't you come down to Brixton, and see us?" asked Wilfrid, as they shook hands.

"Because you never asked me," replied Mr Sparman, smiling as much as he could at such short notice.

"Now you come to mention it, I'm afraid I must plead guilty," said Wilfrid, remembering that he had never

invited his old friend since his installation at St. Sheeroph's. "Will you come this evening? I'm sure they'll be pleased to see you; it will remind us of old times."

Mr Sparman thought for a second or two, and then he decided that it would be very pleasant to spend an evening with some old friends whom he really liked; in fact, the only ones he had ever made, for although the Earl was friendly enough, and always treated him as an equal, he felt that reserve and restraint in his society which comes natural under such circumstances to the inhabitants of old countries.

So he accepted Wilfrid's invitation, and went away quite looking forward to the visit; for his large house, his ugly housekeeper, and the sense of his fat

income, gave him as little pleasure as possessions alone generally give to a man of unsordid disposition, he cared as little about money for its own sake as any man who ever breathed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE OLD FLAME.

To people of ordinary refinement no person is more obnoxious than what is termed "a pushing man."

WHEN Mr Sparman entered the pretty parlours of Mrs Brinkhurst's little house at Brixton, so different from his own large, gloomy, heavily-furnished City residence, he was literally enchanted. The back room led through glass-doors into a neatly-kept, sweet-scented garden, which by reason of its skilful arrangement appeared nearly twice its real

length. The whole place had that air of tasteful adornment which is so often seen in the homes of women of leisure and refinement; from the comically-talking grey parrot, in its handsome cage, to the well-bred black-and-tan terrier on the hearthrug, everything looked cheerful and in keeping.

Mrs Brinkhurst greeted her old spiritual director in a manner which had grown more languid and leisurely during widowhood. Taken alone, her welcome would certainly have had a tendency to depress a man of the Rev. Richard's temperament; but when Helen came out of the garden through the glass-doors and walked briskly towards him to shake hands, in her frank, hearty way, he felt as thoroughly smitten as though Cupid were a reality who had transfixed him

with a love-compelling shaft. Lady Katherine's unconscious victory over him had been won, so to speak, by blockade and famine, Helen Brinkhurst took him by storm. The beauty of the one had impressed him by degrees, partly perhaps because it was the only very admirable image with which he used to come in contact ; for the other he had previously felt a warm admiration, subdued and kept in check by his fanatical notions of the exactingness of his intangible mistress—the Church. Helen, who when he last saw her was an undoubtedly pretty girl, now flashed upon him in the first ripeness of womanhood—tall, rounded, lithe, and graceful ; her splendid eyes sparkling, and her firm cheeks flushing with pleasure at meeting an old friend, in whom she had always felt at least

an interest. She looked the beau-ideal of a beautiful thoroughbred animal in perfect health. In addition to this her reverend admirer knew her to possess a well-ordered mind, sound common sense, and good spirits,—a girl who would cheer the man she loved, and keep him amused even in his dullest moods, and as he took her small, warm hand in his, the thought passed through his mind, “With such an one I could be happy.”

In the course of the evening the fair Helen so completely enslaved him that he felt an absolute satisfaction at not having shown, either by word or look, his partiality for Lady Katherine; not that he was conceited enough to fancy she would be likely to fall into his arms whenever he might declare himself, but had he been rash enough to make

any sign he would have considered himself compromised both in the lady's esteem and in his own, if ever his apparent fickleness should have become known.

All the evening, whether they were sitting indoors or walking round the garden, he was close at Helen's elbow, and Mrs Brinkhurst nudged her son on two or three occasions, directing his attention to them. She knew that the parson was hit, as surely as a veteran partridge-slaughterer knows when a bird has been wounded. The sight pleased her vastly; for, besides being very partial to Mr Sparman, like many of her sex, she preferred his cloth to that worn by either doctor, lawyer, or soldier. If she had liked him as the poor incumbent of a privately-endowed church,

it was only natural that she should esteem him more when he appeared before her in the character of rector, with a rich living. She watched his movements with a pride somewhat similar to that which a man takes in the upward career of a promising youth who has been his apprentice; and when after some pressing she induced Helen to sing "The King of Thule," from Gounod's "Faust," the reverend gentleman was lifted more completely out of himself than he had ever been, even when listening to the most soul-moving anthems or services. The song alone was sufficient to make his lip quiver with emotion, and when it was sung by a beautiful girl with a splendid rich voice, without the least exaggeration or striving after effect, it settled his busi-

ness on the spot, and he would have certainly proposed then and there had the opportunity been more favourable.

The last few notes of the song had hardly died away, when the servant opened the door and announced Mr Wryston, who walked in and greeted mother, son, and daughter, especially the latter, with all the ease and cordiality of a very old friend.

Mr Sparman immediately withdrew himself into the inmost recesses of his shell, watching therefrom the odious, smooth-faced, effeminate-looking little monster bending over the lovely Helen, chatting insinuatingly to her in a half-lover-like way, till the Christian priest felt almost as bloodthirsty as would a Sioux Indian under similar circumstances.

The youthful Reginald waxed not

older. Years made little difference to his pink, hairless face and light-coloured, carefully cut head of hair. Dressed by a scientific tailor, his linen of resplendent whiteness, a handsome opal and diamond horseshoe in his *gros-grain* black silk necktie, he looked what many men consider the beau-ideal of a ladies' man.

Mr Sparman knew nothing of the refusals which the engaging young spark had met with at the hands of the fair Helen, whose mother rather encouraged his visits, with the half-formed hope that she might one day act as mother-in-law to a certain well-appointed house at Fritham, but who now looked upon the dapper little stock-jobber as decidedly plebeian compared with the stately rector of St. Sheeroph. The meeting of the two she felt to be rather a judgment on

her, for she was sufficiently acquainted with the young priest's shy, sensitive nature, to feel it possible that he was altogether scared away by the presence of another suitor, about whose chance of success, he might from a sense of delicacy, refrain from inquiring.

Wryston knew by instinct that the priest was a dangerous rival, and the two—although they made no outward show of their sentiments—inwardly regarded each other with feelings very similar to those of antagonistic roosters in a farmyard.

Mr Sparman, sitting apart in the dusk absorbed in thoughtful self-analysis, looking out on the quiet little garden without seeing it, soon realised his humiliating frame of mind, and rose to leave sooner than he had intended, much to the

chagrin of Mrs Brinkhurst, who made him promise, "Now that he knew his way, to come down and see them very often, for they kept so little company."

And he went home to his large, dreary, echoing house, and dreamt a confused jumble about Helen Brinkhurst giving a golden cup to the King of Thule—represented for that occasion only by Wryston—who after drinking a deep draught out of the gift, threw it over London Bridge into the Thames, and jumped after it. Then Miss Brinkhurst became identified with fair Helen of Troy, in the classical Walpurgis Night, and the disturbed sleeper woke, stretching out his hand to touch the beautiful vision.

Slowly and moodily he dressed himself, breakfasted abstractedly in a quite perfunctory manner, was worried all

day by his curates about the parish schools, and by the old women who always look upon a priest solely as a relieving officer, till he heartily wished himself back again at Clumpton Abbots, and wondered whether an allwise Providence had specially created him to bear crosses.

CHAPTER XXX.

REACTION.

Who, at a time of life so critical,
Would rack his brains with things political ?

By the result Earl Trampleasure attained more credit for correctness as a prophet than generally attends gentlemen of that now discredited profession : six months from the date of his prophecy had barely elapsed, when the Liberal minister threw himself on the country, and if report spoke truly the country felt rather inclined to resent the action of the missile, despite the immense amount of good

which the papers—more especially the Liberal papers—said he had worked while in office.

His political opponents in their addresses to their constituents accused him of having acted in a manner not only unprecedented, but highly reprehensible. They considered that he ought to have resigned at a time which would have suited them better—in fact, he had not consulted the convenience of his antagonists nearly so much as they would have done under similar circumstances, or even to that extent which is usual between antagonists in general. Consequently during the comparatively short time at their disposal they were bound to work with intense vigour—not to organise, for that they had done probably to a greater extent than the other party

—but to utilise their organisation to the utmost.

People who had been dull and drowsy during a winter which had contented itself with being merely gloomy and uncomfortable, without being cold, now woke up to a sense of the coming struggle. Lawyers, printers, publicans, touters, and the general tag-rag and bobtail which profits by a general election, scented the battle from afar, and swarmed on their prey as flies settle on a carcass. Large rooms were rented for committees, posters and squibs covered hoardings and walls of houses, everyone talked more than usual, thereby developing an abnormal thirst, making publicans exultant, but not grateful to the retiring ministry which had brought the country to the verge of the dogs, so the

papers said—at least the Conservative papers—and so many people believed them that “reaction” became quite a stock-phrase.

The select party at Stourton Wood was almost the same as that which graced the Earl's seat just after the defeat of the Liberal party on the Irish Education Bill. There was the Marquis of Hillsborough, fascinating people as usual, by the extreme wryness of his much hooked nose; there was Sir George Juggleton, boiling over with rage at having to contest with a Liberal, a seat which he had almost come to look upon as private property; there was Colonel Dolboy in a chronic state of indignation at the general conduct of the late Government, more especially with regard to the Army Bill; there

was Mr Mosson, who had run down between the intervals of making speeches to his constituents, and who still spoke as though he had a tendency to cold in the head; Jack Knowser, too, without whom no select party would be complete, showed his imposing *figure*, his closely cropped sandy hair, the walk which his friends said he had patented, wearing a look so preternaturally sober, that it was taken as proof positive of inebriety. In the event of the Conservatives coming into power, he expected to obtain an increase of salary, and he went about shaking his head in a spasmodic sort of way which seemed to betoken entire confidence; apparently he felt as elated as though he had actually fingered the actual emolument.

Wilfrid was there, feeling terribly

bored and out of place. Lady Katherine was on a visit to a cousin in the neighbourhood, and without her bright presence to shed its radiance over the place it seemed dreary and depressing, especially as the weather was dull, damp, and cheerless.

The Duke of Butcherby's foxhounds met at various places not far distant three times each week, and most of the guests indulged in the pleasant sport,—thinking—if they thought on the subject—that a fox, among his few feelings, does not number an objection to being chased by dogs with a view to his being ultimately torn to pieces. Even the humane and benevolent Sir George Juggleton—who by reason of constitutional timidity never indulged in fox-hunting—looked upon it as a noble and

manly sport tending to improve the breed of men, dogs and horses. As to the fox, his sufferings might be as acute as the anguish of that very superior ape—man—would be under similar circumstances; but Sir George was a great admirer of the apothegm, “the greatest happiness of the greatest number,” and he applied it on every possible occasion, till it had become a joke against him.

To Wilfrid, however, hunting was a sealed book; he had never possessed a friend who kept hunters. His father preferred racers, and they might be said to have been the indirect cause of his death.

At dinner, the day after his arrival, Wilfrid was an amused listener to a conversation among the fox-hunters of the company. It gave rise to a leading

article in the *Dredge*, which caused some sensation at the time.

“Did you see that the Home Secretary remitted half the sentence on that boy for killing the cat?” said Earl Trampleasure, addressing the Marquis of Hillsborough.

“Yes, I thought it quite as well,” replied the Marquis.

“I thought it a most disgraceful sentence,” said Mr Mosson.

“Magistrate ought to be shot,” blurted out Jack Knowser, with an expressive shake of the head.

“Well, you see, people can’t get over the idea that they may treat the lower animals just as they like,” said Sir George Juggleton, in a judicial sort of manner. “I think the sentence is likely to have a most salutary effect on peo-

ple who set gins, and on those who incite their dogs to worry cats ; cruelty to animals is much too rife."

"Yes, but put the case as your own, Sir George," said Mr Mosson : "suppose it had been a son of yours, a week's imprisonment might be the ruin of the boy's whole life."

"Under the circumstances, I think not ; it's not like being imprisoned for theft, or anything generally recognised as disgraceful. I should say it will do the boy good, and it will act as a caution to other people, which, of course, is the real aim of all punishment."

"I think we're tending towards an exaggerated sympathy for animals, which will lead to mischief," said Mr Mosson, half angrily.

"I can't say I agree with you," said

Sir George; "it seems to me that we are only just emerging from a most disgraceful state of barbarism with regard to animals. I think their rights can't be too carefully guarded, simply because they can't make known their wrongs."

"The greatest happiness of the greatest number—eh, Sir George?" said old Mr Singerton.

"Just so," said Sir George, good humouredly. "I suppose that was the idea of the publican who got up that precious stag-hunt the other day."

"I didn't see it. Was there any account in the papers?" asked Mr Singerton.

"Yes, that's where I saw it," replied Sir George; "a poor little tame deer was turned out, and before it had gone

many yards, the dogs pulled it down; they were called off, and the poor little beast, with a bad wound in its shoulder, had another start; the dogs soon caught it again, and tore it in several places; after one more short run it was finally killed. The crowd, in their intense delight at the sport having yelled themselves hoarse, naturally went to the publican's and consumed beer enough to yield a handsome profit on the cost of the deer."

"Set of beastly roughs!" said Jack Knowser; "but one of the papers amused me most—it wrote a leader on purpose to recommend that the publican should be prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Next we shall have them recommending the society to prosecute the Duke of But-

cherby for setting his hounds after a fox!"

"No, no! that would be going rather too far," said Sir George, smiling and shaking his head; "a well-conducted fox-hunt is one thing, and a parcel of ruffians tormenting a deer is another."

"Well, the principle's the same," returned Jack Knowser. "If you prosecute the publican, you must prosecute the Duke—a pretty thing, indeed, in a free country!"

"I don't think you need be frightened on that score," said Sir George; "in a generation or two we may put a stop to fox-hunting on the score of its cruelty, but I think its sure to last your time."

"I tell you what I wouldn't mind seeing, though," Mr Knowser added, with a yawn, "the passing of an act making it

punishable for man or woman to ride or drive a horse without first passing a practical examination on the subject."

"Ah! there I'm quite with you," said Sir George; "it's painful to see some of the brutes that are allowed to have charge of a horse; they're quite ignorant of the fact that a horse has his susceptibilities and prejudices, consequently they lose all command of their savage temper, and the horse has a bad time of it. It's decidedly a matter for legislation. I shall expect the new Government to bring in a measure."

"I should hope so," said Jack Knowser, stretching his gigantic frame to the utmost, as they all rose to leave the room.

"Apropos of the ill-treatment of animals," said Sir George, glad to air a

pet subject, "I often wonder how long we shall continue to lame our horses by nailing shoes on to their feet?"

"They couldn't go without shoes," objected Jack Knowser.

"I don't object to their wearing shoes, but to the idiotic practice of nailing them on to the feet. It reminds one of the Eastern potentate who fixed the shoes of his slaves by means of wire threaded through their toenails."

"But how would you fix on a horse's shoes?" asked Jack Knowser, thinking that Sir George had taken leave of his senses.

"At the bottoms of their boots, of course," replied Sir George.

"Bottoms of their boots!" repeated Jack Knowser.

"Of course," insisted Sir George, "it's

as easy to make boots for horses as for men ; there's nothing new about it. The ancient Romans had sense enough not to lame their horses, and you may take it for granted that the ancient Chinese were not so foolish as to drive metal into any part of an animal's body, unless they wished to injure it."

"Fancy a horse with boots on !" said Jack Knowser, looking into space and trying to imagine it, but giving up the attempt in despair very shortly after he had commenced.

"Not at all difficult either to fancy or to accomplish," said Sir George, dogmatically ; "they could be made just as sightly as a man's boots ; it's a mere question of economy. Shoes are cheap, boots would cost more ; but they would never disable a horse, either in his feet

nions heard and felt. But to a woman it's impossible," she added somewhat sadly.

"No, it can never be looked upon as woman's work," said Wilfrid gravely.

After a little pause, closing her book and looking on the ground, Lady Katherine said with half a sigh, "it seems ages ago since I first saw you at Clumpton Abbots."

"Yes, things have altered much since then," said Wilfrid, mournfully, fancying he detected in the speaker's tone a faint tinge of remorse.

"You're not sorry that you ceased to be a monk, I suppose?"

"No, perhaps my removal was all for the best,—who can tell?"

Lady Katherine seemed to ponder the question for a moment or two, and then

she said smilingly, "I have to congratulate you on your successful editorship. Papa tells me that the *Dredge* is quite powerful, and much sought after."

"Thanks," said Wilfrid lowering his eyes; and I believe I have to congratulate you on your approaching—— that is——"

"Congratulate me?—on what, pray?" asked Lady Katherine, her colour deepening and her eyes flashing as Wilfrid thought they never could flash.

"On your approaching marriage," replied Wilfrid, looking at her in spite of himself.

"Marriage! to whom?" asked Lady Katherine, impatiently, and with what almost appeared to be a slight stamp of her foot.

"The Marquis of Hillsborough," said

CHAPTER XXXI.

CASTE.

How many marriages for ages past,
Have been upset by tyrannising caste !

NEXT morning nearly everyone went to a meet of the Duke of Butcherby's, at Crupper's Copse. Even Jack Knowser could always manage to beg, borrow, or steal a hunter. The Earl had ridden over to see the hounds throw off, and Wilfrid, feeling that he had neither part nor lot in the matter, preferred to stay in or near the house, looking in a desultory way through some of the books in

the library, or strolling about the garden and the home park, thoroughly dull, purposeless, and out of his element. Almost without intending it, he wandered towards the filbert avenue; it was a spot that he never felt quite sure of finding, leading, as it did, out of a belt of trees, which almost formed a semicircle round the gardens.

Intent on the perusal of "*O fons Blandusiæ!*" from a small pocket Horace, which he very often carried with him, he found himself walking beneath the leafless branches of the filbert avenue before he was aware that he had entered it.

Sauntering slowly along with his eyes fixed on the book, he presently looked up, having a sort of intuition that someone was near. Within a few yards of

him, on a rustic bench, sat Lady Katherine asleep ; a small book lay at her feet, and one hand hung down towards it, as though it had been just dropped.

On picking up the book he recognised the diamond Wordsworth which she had shown him when they last met.

Rapt in thoughtful admiration, for a few seconds he stood motionless. Her perfectly beautiful, saint-like face, its calm, peaceful expression, softened and rounded by sleep, the perfect repose of her figure, all united to form a picture which he could almost have found in his heart to fall down and worship. He took the hand which had apparently held the book and raised it to his lips, then looked again at her face to find her half-open eyes fixed dreamily on him. He started and dropped the hand ;

but Lady Katherine remained in the same position for an instant, and then starting up, she said hurriedly :

“I’ve been asleep, I was so tired I—I dropped my book, I think?”

With a slight bow Wilfrid handed her the book without speaking.

Lady Katherine took it, and rubbing her sleepy eyes began to walk slowly on.

Wilfrid, half a pace behind her, at length broke the silence.

“Lady Katherine,” he said, in a hesitating way, not as though he lacked words, but as though their utterance pained him, “I have to tender you my most humble apologies for having committed an act which could only be justified had you encouraged me as your lover. Although I have admired—

nay, almost venerated you since the first moment I saw you, I have carefully abstained from showing my feelings either by word or by look, and it was only the certainty that you would never know my boldness that made me so far forget myself just now. Of course I never had the presumption to think that we could ever be to each other more than mere acquaintances. After what has happened, I know we can never meet again; may I kiss that hand once more, and say good-bye for ever?"

He spoke with rapidity and passion. Lady Katherine, slightly dazed by sleep, stood silent and motionless, making no attempt to check him. Raising the passive hand once more to his lips, he turned hurriedly round to walk away, meeting Earl Trampleasure at about

two paces distant, puffing his cigar viciously.

“A word with you, Mr Brinkhurst,” said the Earl coldly ; “Kate, you may leave us. I’ll speak to you presently.”

Lady Katherine, now thoroughly awake, instead of replying, as she at first seemed inclined to do, turned haughtily on her heel and walked away.

Earl Trampleasure puffed thoughtfully at his cigar till Lady Katherine was out of hearing, and then he said, less unpleasantly than if he had spoken without reflection :

“I’ve no wish to say anything offensive, but I think it right to inform you that for some time past I have had definite views concerning the disposal of my daughter’s hand.”

“I can assure your lordship that I had not the remotest idea of disturbing those views. Lady Katherine took no part whatever in what you saw; it was merely——in fact, I——I——”

“Don’t let us say any more on the subject,” interrupted the Earl. “On reflection you will see that a union between my daughter and yourself would be impossible. I’ll say no more; I know that I can trust you. Stay here as though nothing had happened.”

“If you’ll excuse me, I would rather leave at once,” said Wilfrid, moodily, studying the decayed leaves at his feet.

“Well, I won’t press you,” said the Earl, quite in his usual manner, knocking off the long white ash of his cigar; “make Stourton Wood your home at any time when you feel inclined.”

“ I’m much obliged,” said Wilfrid, and bowing gravely he walked away in the direction of the house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GRAND MATCH.

To marry one who knew no God ! great Heaven !
The very thought chilled her young blood, and seemed
More like a moral death, or life in Hell,
With fiends cut off from Heavenly sympathy.

THE Earl walked slowly towards the house by another route, and sent a footman to tell Lady Katherine that he wished to see her in his library. She entered with a certain slight air of resentment, which could not escape notice in one so generally even-tempered.

Her father observed it as soon as he caught sight of her. He stood leaning

against the centre table, cutting the leaves of a new book. He wished to make the interview as little formal as possible; and, like all well-bred men, he always studied to say unpleasant things so as to cause a minimum of pain.

“You know I wouldn’t say anything to annoy you needlessly, Kate,” he said, as his daughter came towards him, “but I really must say I was rather surprised to see you on such very—confidential terms with young Brinkhurst. He’s a very gentlemanly young man, no doubt; a young man for whom I have great esteem; very talented, and so on, but still not the sort of husband for my Kate.”

The Earl looked up from his cutting, with a reassuring smile. His daughter, however, was not looking at him; so she

either did not or would not see it, and he proceeded :

“ No, I thought that I had sufficiently explained my wishes, and although you might not—be passionately in love with the Marquis of Hillsborough, still I thought that—in view of the splendid position you would secure by such an alliance, you would—especially as I presume your affections are not really engaged elsewhere.”

At length Lady Katherine looked at the Earl.

“ Father !” she said, with an effort to speak calmly, “ I thought I had made myself understood when you first spoke on the subject. Sooner than marry the Marquis of Hillsborough, I would suffer anything.”

The Earl cut a few leaves in silence,

and then he spoke in a constrained manner, as though he had considerable difficulty in concealing his displeasure :

“I really can’t see any cause for such violent aversion. True, the Marquis is a little older than I should choose if I could have a husband made for you according to my wishes in every particular ; but his age with regard to yours is not so utterly disproportionate. Forty-eight can’t be called old as things go ; and, really, he bears his age so well that——”

“His age is nothing,” said Lady Katherine, with a vehemence quite unusual to her ; “but he’s an Atheist. If I married him, I should feel as if I had sold myself to perdition.”

“Well, really, you know,” began the Earl, with a slight smile, “I don’t think you’re called upon to be so very par-

ticular as that. He would never think of interfering with your devotions; and how often do husband and wife talk together on religious matters, especially people in our position? Look what a splendid station you would occupy, think——”

“Surely you know me sufficiently, father, to be sure that it’s quite unnecessary to hold out any inducements. You know that I would fulfil your wishes if I could do so without losing all self-respect.”

The Earl cut four or five leaves without speaking, and then he said, resignedly :

“Well, Kate, I certainly feel very much disappointed, and I know your mother will be greatly grieved. She had so thoroughly set her mind on your

making a grand match, and this opportunity seemed so favourable; but if you've thoroughly made up your mind, I'll say no more about it. Perhaps, however, you may alter your views, and——"

"Never, father!" interrupted Lady Katherine with emotion, and going up to the Earl, she placed her hand on his shoulder; "never mention it to me again, if you love me," she said, bursting into tears, "the very thought of such a union quite unnerves me."

"Don't cry, Kate," said the Earl, rather affected; "I'll never refer to the matter again without your permission."

He gave her his hand; she pressed it in silence, and went out.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SERVANT'S OPINION.

"O, he's a lovely gentleman!"

NURSE : *Romeo and Juliet.*

IN her own room she found Ruth waiting to assist her to dress for dinner. Noticing the traces of her young mistress's late emotion, reflected in the glass before which she sat, the faithful attendant asked in her usual constrained manner, as she combed the long silken tresses, of which she had watched the growth for eighteen years:

“What has crossed you, my child?”

“Oh, nothing!” replied Lady Katherine, in a low tone, confronted by the reflection of her tell-tale face.

“I suppose the Earl’s been pressing that odious marriage on you,” said Ruth, busy plaiting.

“Yes, he sent for me to the library on purpose to speak about it. I thought he understood that I could never marry the Marquis.”

“I expect the Countess has been worrying him again,” said Ruth, sticking in a hair-pin with great decision; “it won’t be her fault if you don’t make a grand match. She seems to think it the whole duty of woman.”

“I don’t think my mother had told him to speak about it,” said Lady Katherine, looking down as she remembered

the immediate cause of her interview with the Earl.

“Never let anything induce you to marry a man you don’t love,” said Ruth solemnly; “among all the young men now staying in this house, with all their riches and titles, there’s only one that I could bear to see you married to.”

As Lady Katherine kept her eyes downcast, and made no inquiry, Ruth continued:

“I mean Mr Brinkhurst. Such a perfect gentleman! So good, so quiet! I liked him when he was at Clumpton Abbots. I was so sorry when he went away. I liked to confess to him better than to Mr Sparman. Don’t you remember telling me about him the first time you saw him?”

“How you talk, Ruth!” said Lady

Katherine, noting the slight blush that had spread over her face; "my father and mother would never hear of such a thing, besides——"

"Never mind your father and mother in such a matter as that," interrupted Ruth, "he's good and true. In all but rank and riches he's infinitely above any one that I've seen at this house. Such a grand, handsome, calm face! If you love him, and he asks you, marry him. But there, I'm afraid he's too modest, and thinks your family too much above him to propose."

After what had occurred that morning Lady Katherine almost thought so too. With downcast eyes, and hands lightly clasped, she sat motionless, lost in thought. Ever since the first day she saw him, she had liked him and taken an interest

in him. Both his manners and appearance were more to her taste than those of any one she had ever seen. The few conversations she had held with him differed utterly from the jerky coupling of antithetical adverbs and adjectives which the young aristocrats whom she was in the habit of meeting seemed to regard as the correct staple of conversation. Leaving out of the question the difference in their positions, he seemed far too grave and priestlike even to be regarded in the light of a possible lover till that morning, and then his respectful and hopeless admiration produced a certain amount of almost unconscious reciprocity in its object, which time and opportunity might ripen into deep affection. The Countess had ever seemed less like a mother to her than

Ruth, whose utterances always had great weight with her; and while her golden hair was being twisted into beautiful glossy plaits, she sat thinking—thinking of Wilfrid Brinkhurst, as one whose society she might perhaps be able to enjoy unfettered by the trammels of caste when both their gross bodies should be resolved into their elements, and their souls, refined by death, should hold communion together for evermore; and involuntarily wondering whether she could accept him if he were possessed of young Lord Kewt's coronet and wealth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SECOND APPLICATION.

The tendency of people to whom inches are given to take ells, surprises those who forget how many ells they themselves have taken under similar circumstances.

It would seem that some men and women have been called into existence solely for the purpose of bearing misfortune and unhappiness as an edification and encouragement to others. Although the mission is one that in most cases would not be voluntarily chosen by its performers, they often appear to be much

less miserable and querulous than people endowed with all the earth can afford.

Ruth Sweiper, for instance, to all outward appearance bore her trials calmly, patiently, and yet she was married to a man she had never loved ; who, not content with having deserted her, had caused her to extract from her mistress a large sum of money. He had not designedly caused a report of his death to be announced ; it was merely the natural result of his misdeeds, and its effect on Ruth had been to make her give way to feelings which would have otherwise remained undisturbed. The untoward circumstances which had prevented her marrying George Torr, as arranged, was—so to speak—the only slice of luck in her dreary life.

On the morning of the day on which

Ruth gave Lady Katherine her views on marriage, she had received a letter from Mr Sweiper bearing the London post-mark, in which he informed her that having a strong desire to see her he would come down by train on the following day, and that as he knew it would be inconvenient for her to come to Burchester he would meet her at three o'clock in the afternoon at the "Blue Pig," West Compting.

Thinking it well to keep the appointment, she arrived at the "Blue Pig" shortly before the appointed time, and saw her husband lounging in the doorway, beating the bottoms of his trousers with his walking-stick, and contemplating a very florid representation of the unclean animal on the signboard hanging on a post in the front of the house.

Ordering a pint of sherry to be taken into the private room—of which he subsequently drank a very small quantity—he went into the house, followed by Ruth.

“Ruth,” he said, after carefully closing the door, “forgive me; I’ve treated you infamously.”

Ruth thought that he was not far out; but it also occurred to her that he had not travelled over two hundred miles for the purpose of making this confession.

“But I didn’t come all this way to tell you that,” he continued; “the fact is I’ve had a precious run of ill-luck. When I first came across the herring-pond, I *was* lucky, deuced lucky, but lately——well it can’t last for ever, that’s one comfort. Now look here, Ruth, old girl, you know I was always fond of

you, only I never could stick to any woman for long together. It's not my nature. Now look here, Ruth, I want you to get me another five hundred. Only five hundred."

Ruth shook her head gravely without speaking.

"Only five hundred. Make it a loan. if you like. I've got a dead certainty for the next account."

"I can't get you any more; in fact, I won't attempt it," said Ruth decisively.

"Yes, you will; I know you will," said Mr Sweiper, smiling persuasively.

"I tell you I can't and I won't," said Ruth firmly.

"Well, make it a couple of hundred."

"I can't do anything of the kind."

"Well, a cool hundred. I might do

something even with that. It's sure to come back."

"I tell you I can't do anything of the kind."

"Don't rile me, Ruth. You know I can make you," said Mr Sweiper, with an ugly scowl.

"You can't make me," said Ruth, resolutely.

"Well, perhaps not; but I could take steps that would be very unpleasant to you."

"That won't get you the money though," said Ruth, coolly.

"No, but——there, I don't want to have any unpleasantness. You'll get it for me, won't you?"

"I've told you already that I will not. You should have taken better care of what you had before."

“Then you refuse to help me?”

“I do,” replied Ruth, looking full at him.

“Then I’ll make you rue it, Madame Ruth,” he said, striking the table so viciously with his clenched fist that the glass of sherry—which he had poured out and not tasted—jumped up, and was for the most part spilt; then, walking towards the door, he said savagely, “You shall hear from me before long.”

“Add one more to the list of injuries you’ve wrought me,” said Ruth in a low, constrained voice, as though she were rather speaking to herself than to another person.

Mr Sweiper stood irresolute for a second or two with the door-handle in his hand, and then turning round, he said, as though it had cost him a con-

siderable effort to come to the decision, "No, Ruth, I won't harm you. I see you're not to be frightened. A mere act of revenge would do me no good; so there—— 'pon my soul, though, Ruth, you're better-looking than ever," he added, walking towards her. "I shall get quite jealous. How many men are there in the house down there?"

"Only three, the coachmen sleeps out of the house."

"Footman, I suppose? swell young fellow with beautiful bushy whiskers, hair parted and powdered to a nicety, calves looking as if they were padded, eh? Well, who else?"

"There's the butler, and——"

"The butler, ah! that's the sort of fellow, warm old boy, eh, Ruth? Mind, whenever I die you marry the butler;

he's saved money, you take my word—sleeps in the house, I suppose?"

"Of course, he sleeps with his plate."

"Not near you, Ruth, eh?"

"Of course not; he sleeps in his pantry, on the ground-floor. I sleep upstairs."

"Oh, ah, yes!" said Mr Sweiper reflectively. "Well, now mind, I won't have you marry the butler while I'm alive; no, blow me, I couldn't stand that; but if anything happens to me, and it might, you know, mind you marry the butler."

Ruth thought of the young sculptor, who was waiting for her so patiently, although she had told him that her husband was still alive as soon as she became aware of the fact.

"It's precious cruel, though, Ruth,"

continued Mr Sweiper, "that five hundred would be the making of me. I've got some private information. I could give you enough to make you independent—and there, don't say I ain't liberal, marry who you like—I'll never interfere."

Ruth merely shook her head.

"Well, surely you could beg, borrow, or steal a hundred, or even fifty for me. Of course I couldn't speculate on that, but I'd go in for steady industry, buying up lost property, plate, and jewellery; lots of money to be made at that game when you understand it."

As Ruth made no remark, her husband continued, "Well, I declare I'm regularly cleaned out. I've got nothing to go on with. You don't happen to have a five pound-note of your own

that you could lend me till I can turn myself round?"

"I have three pounds," said Ruth, taking a purse from her pocket, and handing Mr Sweiper the money, without observing the splendid diamond ring he wore on his finger.

"Much obliged," said Mr Sweiper, pocketing the money; "I shall send you a Post Office Order as soon as I can turn myself round—good-bye. What, you won't give me a kiss. Well, never mind."

Ruth gave him her hand and went out, and the train took him back to London, there to devise means for providing the sinews necessary for carrying on war against society.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MARQUIS'S ADVICE.

What more can a man be than a gentleman and a
Christian?

THROWING himself into a chair as his daughter left the room, the Earl meditatively stroked the side of his aristocratic nose with the paper knife for some minutes, feeling intensely disappointed. He had looked forward to this marriage as the crowning event of his married life; not only did he desire the Marquis as a mate for his daughter, with some-

what similar feelings to those with which a curate might covet his rector for a son-in-law, but he really liked the Marquis as a friend—gentlemanly, wealthy, and philosophic, a man at once tolerant, and yet with sufficient warmth as a partisan, when in his place in the House of Lords. He was perfectly ready and willing to take Lady Katherine to wife; he admired her serene beauty, and loved her devotedly—that is, as devotedly as a forty-eight-year-old peer ever loves a woman. With all these promising ingredients of success, the lady's consent—the one essential element—was wanting. Under such aggravating circumstances it could hardly be wondered at that the Earl should feel depressed and annoyed, and should scratch his lordly nose for a longer period than he had at

first intended. Having at length arrived at the conclusion that nothing he could do would alter the matter, he rose from his chair, closed the book he had been cutting with a loud report, and rang the bell, thinking it only right that the anxious lover should not remain any longer under a false impression.

The footman who answered the bell informed his master that the Marquis had just come into the “’all.” In due time he was ushered into the library.

“Bad news! Bad news!” said the Earl, as his friend entered.

“Has the result of the polling been declared anywhere?” asked the Marquis, sitting at the table and listlessly flapping the cover of a book.

“No, I don’t mean political bad news,” replied the Earl, a little disappointed

that his friend should not anticipate any other news. "No; I meant that I've just been speaking to my daughter on a subject which I fondly hoped to be completely settled."

"Isn't it, then?" asked the Marquis sharply.

"No; I'm sorry to say she resolutely refuses, and as far as I can see there seems no chance of her relenting. Of course women are never absolutely certain, but——"

"Most women, I grant you," interrupted the Marquis; "but she means what she says—a good girl, thoroughly good! I suppose I'm too old for her?"

"No, she doesn't seem to attach any importance to that."

"What then, pray?"

"Well——" hesitated the Earl, "she

says she could never consent to unite herself to an Atheist."

"The staunchest Churchmen in the three kingdoms, and she calls me an Atheist," said the Marquis meditatively, "I who always take part in Church questions, and uphold the cause of orthodoxy—it's rather hard; but, really, I can't see that it could matter much even if I were a Jumper, or a Shaker, or one of the Plymouth Brethren. I should never ask her to jump, or to shake, and I should never think of interfering with her religion."

"That's just what I told her," said the Earl.

"Yes, women have no toleration; if you don't think exactly as they do they'll quarrel with you."

"I can assure you her refusal an-

noyed me very much indeed—very much,” said the Earl, deprecatingly, as he resumed the operation on his nose with the paper knife; “in fact, ‘annoyed’ is hardly the word. I feel crushed—quite crushed; but it can’t be remedied—one must submit to the inevitable.”

“Just so,” said the Marquis, musingly, “and, mind you, I’m not prepared to say that she’s not right; for although I’m a staunch Churchman, I certainly can’t lay claim to her intensity of devotion, and for such a girl to have a husband perfectly cold and callous in private on religious matters, would, no doubt, make her young life perfectly miserable.”

“Girls have no business with such nice shades of fancy, they should think as they like, and let their husbands do

the same. I've no patience with her," said the Earl, throwing the paper knife on the table.

"I'm afraid we're all too apt to condemn others when they don't agree with us," said the Marquis, smiling; "now you're intolerant—you forget that Lady Katherine, being a woman, cannot be expected to take things as coolly and as logically as a man—in fact, woman would lose her charm if she did."

"But still one does expect a little strong common sense," said the Earl, dismally.

"No, I think things are better as they are at present; strong common sense does away with supernatural religion, which is no doubt very comforting to the majority of those who believe in it; without it, the world

would be harder than it is; besides, one doesn't like to see anything venerable demolished unless it happens to be a source of great evil. Some men would carry out their one idea of progress so remorselessly! they don't believe in religion or monarchy, therefore they'd abolish both, and then they'd pull down Westminster Abbey, merely because it would be useless for the purpose for which it was built; that's where I become intolerant. I've no patience with them."

"I suppose we're all intolerant on one or more points," said the Earl, smiling.

"No doubt of it," said the Marquis, and then, after a pause, he continued, "Perhaps in addition to Lady Katherine's objection to my opinions, she has some prior attachment?"

“Well, as you’ve put the question, I’ll tell you—but till this morning I hadn’t the remotest idea of such a thing. Not an hour ago, in the filbert avenue, I saw young Brinkhurst kissing her hand, quite like a lover of the old school; but of course the idea’s absurd!”

“What, that very silent and self-contained young man, your *protégé*?”

“Not exactly my *protégé*.”

“There’s a grandness of outline about his features that I greatly admire, he reminds one of a young Roman gladiator, or a monk, or——”

“Monk! there you’ve hit it! He was a monk.”

“A Roman Catholic, then?”

“No, he was in that Anglican monastery at Clumpton Abbots—ran away from home to join it, and the father

took him away by a writ of *habeas corpus*."

"Yes, I think I remember something about it. So you sent him about his business?"

"No, not exactly. I told him, as delicately as I could, that the thing was impossible, and, like a sensible fellow, he made no attempt to argue the point."

"You're quite convinced that the thing is impossible?"

"Aren't *you*?" asked the Earl, looking up in some surprise.

"Not quite."

"Well, but he has no position, no—— in fact, nothing; and his father was only a stock-jobber, or something of that sort."

"Yes, but look at the man himself. He's a gentleman. Could he be more

if he were a Duke? Besides, if your daughter loves him, why should you keep her pining for perhaps a dozen years, till you succeed in finding some one who you think possesses all the requisites of a husband for an Earl's daughter?"

"But surely you wouldn't have me give my consent to such a marriage?" said the Earl, in blank astonishment.

"Perhaps if you don't you may never have to give your consent to any other; for I should take Lady Katherine to be a girl who would not give her hand unless her whole heart went with it."

"But surely—" began the Earl.

"Oh! no doubt you'd prefer some sprig of nobility," interrupted the Marquis; "but then he might not happen to be a gentleman, and your daughter

might not fancy him. I admire young Brinkhurst, both as to his manners and face. How I do hate the sight of a fat-faced young man ! I think if I had a cherub-faced son I should make him continually row or run races till he presented a decent appearance.”

“But surely it would be desirable to find some one more equal in station.”

“Oh, yes ! if the other *desiderata* could be combined ; but while you’re looking about for the shadow you let the substance escape. The man’s a gentleman in every way ; what does it matter that he has no handle to his name ? If Lady Katherine had fallen in love with one of your footmen I should have recommended you to do all in your power to oppose her choice, because such a marriage could not possibly

be productive of happiness. A man may raise a woman to his own level, you know, but a woman can never raise a man."

"Well, but he's decidedly below her in the social scale," suggested the Earl, mildly.

"Yes, but only slightly so, because he's above his own exact *status*, and life is really much too short for attention to minute shades of difference in this respect. If you like the man, and if your daughter likes him, I can't see that anything else is necessary. It's surely much better for two people to secure happiness, and to avoid unhappiness, than to let them be ruled by some abstract idea held by other people, whose only interest in them is a species of malicious curiosity."

"Then I am to understand that you

would advise me to sanction his paying his addresses to my daughter?" asked the Earl, who, although aghast at the notion, was willing and almost anxious to be ruled by a will stronger than his own, especially as it happened to be possessed by an individual standing a step higher than himself on the social ladder.

"Yes," replied the Marquis, after a few minutes' thought.

"Well, I certainly should not have expected such advice from you," said the Earl, evincing a sense of relief at having obtained a definite and practicable opinion; "I'll think it over. I think I shall do as you say."

"So do I," thought the Marquis, as he rose to leave the room, for he knew the Earl's character thoroughly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FRAUD.

Detection in a crime is sometimes an adequate punishment.

For about five minutes the Earl, who never did anything precipitately, sat and flattered himself that he was "thinking it over," and then he adopted the conclusion that had been arrived at for him.

Opening a handsome red morocco paper-case, and having found a sheet of note paper elegantly stamped with his crest,

“without extra charge,” he proceeded to write a short letter to Wilfrid Brinkhurst, expressing regret if he had said anything unpleasant, and inviting him to pay another visit to Stourton Wood as soon as he could conveniently manage it.

Having completed his letter, the Earl rose from his chair with a sense of satisfaction at having done a meritorious act which he could not have been at all expected to do ; experiencing that feeling of exultation at having performed a work of supererrogation, which the Church in its fourteenth article holds to be so dangerous. He dressed for dinner with a better appetite than usual, and, for that day at least, dyspepsia did not mark him for her own.

The following morning, after break-

fast, the Countess met her husband in the library, and he then related to her the meeting in the filbert avenue, the philosophic view which the Marquis had taken of his disappointment, his advice, and its effect.

“Good gracious, George! what on earth could have induced you to be so silly?” said the Countess, with considerably more than her usual energy and feeling.

The Earl had barely finished his narrative, and was about to conclude it with some light and airy peroration about the superiority of happiness even to wealth and station.

“Well really you know, Constance,” said the Earl, hesitatingly, “what could I do. I thought the Marquis behaved very well.”

“Yes, yes, but you didn’t manage

him properly," said the Countess impatiently; "the idea of taking no for an answer from a chit of a girl that doesn't know her own mind!"

"She was so very positive on the point, that I felt it would be worse than useless to press it further," said the Earl, deprecatingly.

"No, you need not have pressed it any further then; but the idea of dismissing the Marquis!"

"It seemed to me that the Marquis took a very proper view of the matter. I felt bound to tell him; it would have been most improper not to have done so."

"Nonsense! you need not have told the Marquis anything. If you had merely mentioned the matter to me, I would have set it all right; it's so provoking!

I thought the matter was quite settled," and the Countess bit her lip viciously.

"Well, but—" began the Earl.

"The idea of writing to that Brinkhurst boy ! The very idea of letting any one in such a position marry your daughter ! How the neighbours would chuckle ! I should never be able to show myself in the place again. I can fancy those Clumptions how they would enjoy it !" and Lady Trampleasure gave vent to a spiteful little laugh.

"I did exactly as the Marquis advised," said the Earl, doggedly, by this time rather annoyed at his wife's scolding tone.

"Yes, but you ought to have known better. The Marquis is a dear good creature, but weak—ah ! yes, decidedly weak ;" and the Countess shook her head,

as though she would say, "I'm not weak;" "he'd give up anything rather than cause pain to anyone."

As the Earl, looking rather sulkily into space, made no remark, the Countess continued, "I hope you haven't committed yourself to young Brinkhurst. What did you say to him?"

The Earl thought for a moment or two, he certainly had not committed himself. "I merely expressed regret if I had said anything to give him pain, and invited him to pay us another visit as soon as he could make it convenient."

"I'm glad it's no worse," said the Countess, with an air of relief; "we'll start at once for Paris or—no, some little place will be better—say, Baden or Ems. The Marquis can meet us there, and

marry her before she knows where she is."

"But perhaps the Marquis——"

"There's no perhaps about it," interrupted the Countess, in whom a wonderful amount of energy seemed to be developed by the bare idea of what the Clumptions and other dear friends would say if Lady Katherine should marry the son of a stock-jobber. "Leave the Marquis to me. I'll ring for Ruth, and tell her to get everything ready to start to-morrow morning. She'll grumble at such short notice, no doubt, but she must manage it somehow."

As the Countess stood near the bell-handle she pulled it herself, while her husband looked aghast at her unusual decisiveness.

The bell had not nearly finished ringing when Ruth opened the door.

"Come in, Ruth," said Lady Trampleasure. Ruth came in, and shut the door behind her.

"I want you to get Lady Katherine's things ready so that she can start for the Continent to-morrow morning. It's short notice, I know; but I suppose you can manage it?"

"No, my lady, I can't," replied Ruth firmly.

The Earl gave a little start of surprise, and Lady Trampleasure, looking at her servant with an angry scowl, asked "why not?"

"Sooner than see my Kate married to a man she doesn't like, I'd see her dead," said Ruth, as though the words were dragged from her.

“Really!” began the Earl.

“I can quite understand,” interrupted the Countess, looking fixedly at Ruth, “that you should be fond of Lady Katherine; you’ve taken charge of her since she was quite a baby, so it’s only natural; but you must allow me to be the best judge of a husband for her. No doubt you’ll be able to live with her, even when she’s married. Make as much haste as you can; we must start whether the things are ready or not.”

“Kate shall not go,” said Ruth, in a low, dogged tone.

“Really!”—began the Earl.

“You forget yourself,” said the Countess, with a stern look.

“I tell you my child shall not go,” said Ruth passionately, but without raising her voice much.

"You must remember, my good woman," said the Earl soothingly, "that although you've always been allowed to have the care of Lady Katherine, you've no legal control over her."

"Yes, I have," said Ruth, looking down, apparently experiencing more delicacy in contradicting her master than in defying her mistress.

"You're not doing yourself any good Ruth," said the Countess tolerantly.

"My good woman, you talk sheer nonsense," said the Earl calmly. "Pray, what legal right can you pretend to have?"

"A mother's right," replied Ruth, in a hushed manner, without looking at her questioner.

"Think what you're saying, Ruth," said the Countess, her face growing pale and haggard.

“Pshaw!” said the Earl, a little irritably. “How can you have a mother’s rights?”

“Because I am her mother,” replied Ruth, almost in a whisper, her eyes still downcast; then looking shamefacedly at the Countess, she said, in a rather louder voice, “I told you it would come to this, if you ever tried to force her into a marriage. I suffered enough in my own.”

The Earl looked from one to the other, saying nothing, but probably thinking the more.

For a second or two the Countess seemed to have lost the power of speech, and then rising from her seat, she said with an effort, “Leave the room, you base creature! Do you expect anyone to believe such an assertion? Leave the room, I say!”

“Certainly,” said Ruth, slowly retreating towards the door; “but your ladyship knows I have proofs. It’s a bad business,” she added with a sigh. “I’ve suffered enough through letting my child be brought up not to know me for her mother.”

“Go, I tell you—go!” said the Countess, passionately, pointing towards the door.

Ruth went slowly out, and no sooner had she closed the door gently after her, than her [mistress fell back on to the large arm-chair in a genuine fainting-fit.

The Earl, in his first impulse, hurried towards her; finding that she reclined in a tolerably comfortable attitude, he rang the bell, and told the footman, who answered it, to send Mrs Podblow immediately.

That corpulent lady, rustling imposingly in her watered silk, bustled in sooner than might have been expected. Having uttered the usual exclamations of pity and surprise, she became mistress of the situation; and the Earl went out, quite convinced that for eighteen years he had been cheated into lavishing parental affection on a child which did not belong to him. Under the soothing influence of a cigar in the filbert avenue, he came to several wise conclusions—firstly, that it was useless to weep over spilt milk; secondly, that it would be inexpedient to cry stinking fish; thirdly, that he would wash his dirty linen at home.

With regard to the first maxim, his wife had no doubt erred through excess of zeal to please him, combined, perhaps,

with a craving to free herself from a certain amount of tacit reproach, which she, rightly or wrongly, fancied would attach to her should she remain childless.

Consequently it would be in every way expedient to forgive her, and to avoid letting the world know that Lady Katherine could not properly lay claim to the distinguished sire and dam who had always taken credit for her.

Of course, if he chose, he could go into heroics and the divorce court) and make known how he had been fooled to every one who could afford to buy a newspaper. To do this would certainly seem like cutting off his nose to spite his face, an act which he had far too much kind and Christian feeling ever to think of committing. Clearly, the first

thing to be done was to prevent the knowledge, at present vested in only three people from spreading among those typical members of society who enjoy a scandal in exact proportion to the proximity of their connection with the object of it. Muttering the lines in Hudibras :—

“Nature has made man’s breast no windores,
To publish what he does within doors ;
Nor what dark secrets there inhabit,
Unless his own rash folly blab it.”

He regretfully threw away his half-smoked cigar and returned to the library, just in time to see Mrs Podblow’s efforts crowned with success. Having dismissed that lady, he sat down near his wife, who was resting her forehead on her hand with her hair disarranged, pale and miserable, fixedly looking at nothing.

“Constance !” said the Earl.

Lady Trampleasure remained silent and motionless.

“Constance, I’ve not come to reproach you,” said the Earl gently; “let us go on as if nothing had happened. I think——”

“Forgive me,” said the Countess, laying her hand on his arm with an anxious look, and almost in a whisper.

“Certainly, you have my forgiveness,” replied the Earl, taking her hand. “I was going to say, I think it must be clear to you that there is no necessity for us to go to Paris?”

“Oh! yes,” said the Countess, looking down,” and believe how sincerely grieved I am that I deceived you; but having once done so, it seemed absolutely necessary that the girl should make a marriage suitable to her supposed sta-

tion—my persistence in this, brought about the revelation. I'm glad it did, for the burden of the secret was sometimes almost too much for me to bear; but it seemed such a dreadful thing that you should not have an heir, and I brooded over it while you were away, and then I received a letter from Ruth telling me how she had been left, and asking me to take her back again after her confinement. Of course I hoped it would have been a boy, but as it turned out, the great object of the sin was unattained,—a judgment on me, no doubt, Ah! it was a wicked thing”

“Say no more about it,” said the Earl meditatively. “I shall always feel the same love for—— Kate, and if she were to marry young Brinkhurst no one need be any the wiser.”

“Ruth wishes her to marry him,” said the Countess timidly, and with a sense that events had no right to happen fortunately for her; “but as to the girl’s own inclinations I know nothing.”

The Earl thought he had seen sufficient in the filbert avenue to enable him to feel tolerably satisfied on the point, for it seemed to him that a marriage between Kate and George Brinkhurst would be the best thing that could happen for all of them. Had he known the exact circumstances he might have been less confident.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ACCOUNT.

A villain's death seems like deliverance—
His relatives, who scarce can shed a tear,
Would mourn the faithful hound who guards their home
With more sincerity.

THAT periodical death—sleep—without which none of us could live, was looked forward to on that eventful day by Countess, Earl, and Ruth, with the longing which overwrought feelings always produce. The household retired to rest at about eleven o'clock, and each

one in due time secured the inestimable blessing of approximate oblivion.

The Earl, a light sleeper, was no doubt more easy of awakenment than usual on that particular night. At about two o'clock in the morning, he woke up suddenly, as completely as though he had not been asleep; in fact, his consciousness had probably been only slightly obscured. A cry, as of pain or terror, or both, struck his ear. It came from the butler's pantry, where that fat functionary slept with a large assortment of very valuable plate. Flunkett, the butler, was of the habit of body which one usually associates with a heavy sleeper; and, as a matter of fact, during the fifteen years he had held his much-coveted situation, he had never alarmed the household either by somnambulism,

or by nocturnal vocalism, or by any irregularity whatever. It had become a joke against him, that the housekeeper who slept nearly forty yards away from his room, had sometimes been roused from sleep by his snoring.

The Earl knew his butler to be a man very unlikely to waste his sleeping hours by crying out without some very good cause, and yet it seemed absurd to fancy that anyone had broken into the house. There was no noise, and no further lamentation ; Flunkett was silent.

Earl Trampleasure was a rather timid nobleman, but he always tried to do his duty ; or perhaps it would be more correct to say, he endeavoured to do that which he knew would be expected of him, even when it happened to be repugnant to his feelings. He jumped lightly out

of bed, without rousing the Countess, wrapped his dressing-gown round him, placed his lordly feet in his elegantly-worked slippers, took a revolver—which was always kept loaded—out of an elegant case standing on a carved oak bracket on one side of the dressing-table, opened the bedroom door gently, walked down two flights of stairs, turned to the right, and at the end of a short passage stood at the door of Flunkett's room. The door was open; there was a light inside.

The Earl entered, and recoiled involuntarily at the scene which met his view. Sitting upright in his bed was Flunkett, looking the very picture of misery, his round, rubicund, respectable-looking face surmounted by a white nightcap; a towel tied very firmly into

his mouth with string, his hands lying in front of him on the counterpane bound together with thin rope. The lid of the plate-chest stood open, as well as the doors of the cupboard containing the larger articles, such as candelabras, epergnes, &c. A man with a life preserver in his hand—whose head had evidently the moment before been in the plate-chest—rushed towards the Earl, who incontinently raised the revolver, and almost without intending it, pulled the trigger. The weapon being beautifully finished—requiring a lighter pull of trigger than is usual with these pistols—went off, as his lordship afterwards said, “almost of itself;” the burglar staggered and fell as dead as a door-nail.

For a second or two the Earl stood motionless, almost as surprised as the man

who has fired at a partridge with his eyes shut, and who on opening them finds that the bird has been unfortunate enough to die from the consequences of having placed itself in the line of fire.

The Earl walked towards his quarry, and standing close to him could see that his eyes were closed. The bullet—a heavy one—had gone clean through him, giving more signs of its course on the wall than on the burglar, who was much better dressed and of a quite different appearance to what might have been expected from the occupation at which he had been so effectually interrupted.

The Earl looked at the dead man regretfully to a certainty. He was not used to slaughtering animals, but there were none of those poignant twinges of horror

and remorse which might reasonably be supposed would assert themselves in the breast of such a singularly humane gentleman; in fact, he was rather surprised to remember that when a young man of five and twenty, he had experienced more pain at having put a rifle bullet into one of his father's cows, than he now felt at having committed manslaughter.

Pistol in hand the Earl stood for nearly a minute contemplating the dead burglar, and thinking that this Ishmaelite, both as regarded himself and society, was far better off than he had been a few minutes before.

Ever since the shot had been fired, Mr Flunkett, in the most respectful way, had been trying to attract the attention of his master. Attempts at clearing his

throat were only attended with partial success, owing to the presence of the towel in his mouth; but the Earl, just then remembering his faithful servant, turned round and said:

“Ah, Flunkett! I forgot you.”

Placing the pistol carefully on the bed, he proceeded to untie the string which secured the towel across the butler's mouth, and he was just receiving that functionary's thanks and congratulations, when the entire household came hurrying along the passage.

First came the Countess in an elegant blue wrapper, who gave vent to such usual exclamations as would have been uttered by any other female under similar circumstances. She was glad to see her husband unharmed, and she said so, but she objected to being roused

from sleep and brought out of her bed in the middle of a cold February night, and she would have much preferred that the burglar should have been shot outside, somewhere in the grounds. It seemed so very unpleasant to have such a man lying dead in the house, even although he only incommoded the butler.

Then came Lady Katherine ; her fair hair, hanging down her back, formed a strong contrast to the colour of the long black cloak thrown on hastily, and reaching nearly to her heels. Naturally her first thoughts were for her father's safety ; but she looked inexpressibly grave and solemn as she bent over the corpse to see if any spark of life remained. To her religious mind it seemed intensely sad that a fellow-

creature should have been sent into the presence of his Maker so suddenly—

“Unhousel’d, unanointed, unanneal’d,”

without being allowed a moment to breathe a prayer of sorrow and repentance. She had just finished her inspection, when Ruth stood in the doorway, looking even paler than usual, in a long black cloak somewhat similar to that worn by her young mistress.

“Come in, Ruth; come and look,” said Lady Katherine, in a hushed voice.

Ruth knew by intuition that she was about to look on a dead body. Stepping on tiptoe she came partly into the room, and bent forwards to look at the corpse. No sooner did she catch sight of the face, than she started back, and putting her hand before her eyes, she staggered

and would have fallen but for the support of Lady Katherine. No wonder she tried to shut out the dread sight. Her child had called her to look at the dead body of its father, killed while breaking his country's laws.

The footman and all the maidservants had by this time found their way to the door, and, last but not least, came Mrs Podblow, quite out of breath, in a not very clean white flannel dressing-gown. She assisted Lady Katherine to take Ruth to her bedroom ; the whole household then retired to their chambers, and no doubt some of them slept. Mr Flunkett, rather humiliated by the indignity which he had suffered, completed his slumbers on a couch in an adjoining room.

Notice was given to the proper autho-

rities, the body was removed to the "Blue Pig" at West Compting, and in due time Mr Sweiper's remains were sat on by twelve of his countrymen, under the direction of the Coroner for the county, who appeared to be much gratified at having to entertain a real live Earl.

Mr Flunkett, who gave his evidence with much exactness, was evidently labouring under the impression that a great liberty had been taken with him, and he made a sort of deprecatory apology for not having given a better account of the burglar, by explaining that the towel was in his mouth and his hands were tied before he knew where he was. He further stated that as soon as the shot was fired he heard the sound of wheels proceeding rapidly

along the gravel drive towards the lodge.

The lodge-keeper, a very old man rather hard of hearing, deposed to the fact that the gate had been forced open, and that he found it open in the morning, and saw marks of wheels on the road-way, such as might have belonged to a light cart.

The Earl gave a concise account of his share in the business, nervously coughing behind his hand each time he had to pause to have his words taken down, and feeling by no means pleased with his position.

Dr Barkling gave evidence in the clearest possible manner, to the effect that having been called to the deceased man, he found that a bullet had gone clean through his body, but that it was

impossible to define the exact cause of death without making a post-mortem examination.

The Coroner had been of opinion that a post-mortem examination was quite unnecessary; so Dr Barkling received one guinea instead of three, and wished that burglars visiting the district would get shot more frequently, and that a future Coroner might take a more extended view of the necessity for post-mortems.

The Coroner laid down the not very intricate law on the subject, with the utmost lucidity, complimented the noble homicide on his bravery, and left the jury to arrive at their verdict, feeling slightly uneasy as to whether they might not consider it their duty to return a verdict of manslaughter, in spite of his

very laborious summing up to the contrary effect.

They were not very long in coming to a conclusion, but they made a great noise during the operation, insomuch that the beadle thought it right to inform them that they were at liberty to complete their discussion in a private room if they so desired ; but they were far too excited to listen to this suggestion.

Mr Trumpit, the wheelwright, wished to return the brief and simple verdict of "serve him right ;" but Mr Sloper, the foreman, keeper of a general shop, who regularly read the newspaper reports of debates in the House of Commons and the law reports, explained to his choleric neighbour that such a report would not be parliamentary. Two other gentlemen,

with much palm-thumping, wanted to know whether they couldn't propose three cheers for the Earl. Another jurymen thought they should express an opinion that being shot by a nobleman was a far too pleasant death for the deceased, and that it would be well, if possible, to resuscitate him, so that he might be hung, drawn, and quartered, as a warning to the rest of the fraternity. Still another one suggested that whatever their verdict might be—"and he was sure he didn't wish to dictate to them in any way"—they should add a rider, recommending the government to offer a reward for the apprehension of the other burglar who was supposed to have driven away in the light cart as soon as the shot was fired. This proposition met with very general approval,

but eventually a verdict was returned in the exact words that the Coroner had put into their mouths, each juryman experiencing a considerable amount of satisfaction and self-laudation at the exactness with which he had interpreted the laws of his country.

The Coroner addressed a word of congratulation to the Earl; the jurymen buzzed about the room in order to see the last of him, the beadle stood at the door, penny cane in hand, to usher him out, and the proceedings terminated.

Mr Sweiper was buried by the parish, not because his wife grudged the cost, or because she bore him any malice; in fact, her grief was considerably increased by his mode of sepulture. But it was thought, both by the Countess and by

herself, that it would be for the best in every way that she should not take any action in the matter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SETTLED.

Who loves his prize the best ? He who in pride
Has borne it off at first with scarce an effort ?
Or he who grasps it after weary years
Of patient striving ?

WHEN Kate became aware that, instead of being the daughter of a Lord, she could only claim as father a very common commoner, the news, so far as regarded herself, affected her about as little as it is possible to imagine. She still retained her own identity and self-consciousness undisputedly and unmistakeably, and had she even discovered

that she owed her origin to some of those peeuiliar methods described in classic mythology, she would have been none the less happy. At peace with all mankind—some she loved more than others—for her mother she had always felt more affection than for the Countess. The Earl would always retain her sincere affection, notwithstanding her inability to claim blood relationship with him; moreover he had been perfectly blameless in the matter, being, in fact, so deeply injured, and bearing his wrongs in such a Christianlike and gentlemanly way, that her love for him could not but be increased.

She felt for the Countess a sort of loving pity, in that she had been betrayed into a sin, out of which retreat was nearly impossible.

Although the suggestion of wrong came from the Countess, at first sight Ruth certainly seemed the more blameable, but her daughter freely forgave her.

The receipt of Earl Trampleasure's letter caused Wilfrid to experience a mild sense of gratification—it showed the esteem in which he was held by a noble gentleman who felt uneasy at having said or done anything which could give annoyance to one with whom he associated on friendly terms; but it did not occur to him as possible that the Earl could have changed his mind with regard to the disposal of Lady Katherine's hand. So long as she remained unbetrothed it would be a pleasure even to see her. Having also the wholesome feudal feeling that an invitation from a

person of high rank should be considered almost in the light of a command, he replied to the invitation accepting it for the following Saturday till Monday.

Compared with the bustle and confusion in which Wilfrid had hitherto seen the Earl's seat, its quiet and the absence of guests seemed delightful. Having assisted in bringing about the return of their party by eating and drinking of the best that Stourton Wood could produce, they had returned to town wondering at their success, which exceeded even the most sanguine expectations. Undoubtedly there had been a great "reaction," whether it was to be attributed to the interference of the late Government with those facilities for drinking, so dear to the British public,

and to the publican, or whether it could be justly considered as the result of that gradual development of even the most radical Working-manism, into staunch Conservatism, which will probably be Completed on or before the day of judgment, it behoved not the Sir George Juggletons, the Mr Singertons, and the Mr Mossons to inquire.

Jack Knowser found the Conservative Government not more anxious to increase his yearly stipend than their predecessors had been, and he was not slow to characterise both parties as an "infernal set of impostors!"

The Earl met Wilfrid in the hall, and greeted him with as much cordiality as though he had been a suitable Duke or Marquis in search of a wife.

The Countess, pleading indisposition,

absented herself from the dinner table. Lady Katherine was present, calm and beautiful, as usual; to Wilfrid her presence seemed to tone down some of the meal's coarse realism. Unless he had been taking some very severe exercise which caused the craving for food to predominate over the finer feelings, he always experienced a sense of humiliation that man, made in God's own image, should require food even more frequently and regularly than the beasts that perish. The successors of the old Greek and Roman religionists have certainly steered clear of the incongruity of picturing their Deity as requiring meat and drink, but it is none the less a severe blow to man's self-esteem when his yearnings force him to be as solicitous about food as the lowest things

that crawl, and as useless without it as a steam-engine lacking coal and water.

For a few minutes after the lady had withdrawn, the Earl sat in silence, fingering the slim stem of his wine glass, gazing abstractedly into its bowl, as though he experienced a difficulty in knowing how to begin. At length he said, without looking up, "I suppose it did not occur to you that I had any definite idea in asking you to come here again—so soon?"

"Well no," replied Wilfrid musingly, "in a vague sort of way, I thought it might be possible that, in your extreme delicacy and desire not to wound my feelings, you might——"

"No, it was not that," interrupted the Earl gently.

"There was certainly no occasion for

anything of the sort. I was decidedly to blame, and you could not have spoken with greater kindness."

With a deprecating wave of his hand the Earl continued, "The facts are these: I spoke to Kate with reference to what I had seen, and said that I felt somewhat surprised, as I had looked upon her marriage with the Marquis as a settled thing. She then told me that nothing would induce her to marry the Marquis, because of his being an Atheist. I endeavoured to persuade her, but it was useless. I informed the Marquis of all the circumstances, and he recommended that, if there was a mutual attachment, I should give my sanction to your marriage with her. Well I——"

"Excuse my interrupting," said Wilfrid: "I feel gratified by the Marquis's

good opinion, but Lady Katherine has never given me the slightest encouragement."

"Why, you're dreaming!" said the Earl, good humouredly; "didn't I see you kiss her hand in the filbert avenue?"

"Yes, I was merely taking a hopeless leave of her;" and Wilfrid proceeded to explain the circumstances.

"Then she said absolutely nothing to guide you?"

"No; you came up before she could say anything."

"Hum!" mused the Earl, feeling his chin for at least a minute. "Well, to make a long story short, I may tell you that Kate is not my daughter. Ruth is her mother; her father—whom I had not the pleasure of knowing—is dead."

"Not your daughter!" said Wilfrid,

with widely open eyes, and experiencing such a mixture of emotions that he felt quite uncertain as to their product.

“Strange, but true,” continued the Earl. “I understand that Ruth would prefer you as a husband for her daughter to any one else. With regard to the lady’s sentiments I can offer no opinion; so far as I am concerned, you have my full sanction to press your suit.”

“I feel deeply indebted; but you surprise me beyond measure,” said Wilfrid, hesitatingly.

“You’ve really nothing to feel indebted for,” rejoined the Earl; “for when you come to think it over, you can’t fail to see that I have a direct motive in wishing you to marry Kate, because in that case all scandal would be avoided; otherwise her mother might prevail on her

to marry some one low in the social scale, and then people's tongues would wag with infinite activity."

Of course Wilfrid saw in which direction the Earl's interest lay, as soon as it was pointed out to him, and it was just on the point of occurring to him, "Was I invited here before or after the discovery?" when the Earl saved him the trouble of considering the question, by saying, "I feel sensible it may appear to you, that in asking you to come here again I merely wished to make a cat's-paw of you; but I give you my word—of course you're not obliged to take it—but I can assure you that when I wrote to you, I was ignorant of——what has since transpired."

"Believe me, it would never occur to

me to doubt you," said Wilfrid, with sincere effusion.

"Well," said the Earl, rising to go into the drawing-room, "you have a fair field and some favour. I hope you'll succeed."

Wilfrid remained at Stourton Wood till the Tuesday, and by that time he managed to learn that he was not indifferent to the woman he had till so lately looked upon as perfectly unattainable.

In less than three months they were married in the old church at West Compting, with the assistance of two bridesmaids and Mr Sparman as best man. Ruth Sweiper looked on from the gallery, happy and contented at seeing her child mated to one in every way suited to her.

The Clumptions and others not unnaturally remarked on the exceeding quietness with which the marriage of an Earl's daughter was allowed to take place, but in the course of nine days the wonder as usual subsided. The Earl gave a handsome dowry, and the happy pair took a pretty detached house at Fulham.

Ruth called there about once every week, always while the master was away at his office. It is hardly necessary to say that she married George Torr, who had waited for her nearly twenty years. The Earl bore his trial bravely, and only the four other persons interested ever knew how badly two women had treated him. Without enlightening his brother Tom as to the reasons, he made him understand that

Lady Katherine would never accept any of the revenues of Stourton Wood.

Shortly after his old pupil's marriage Mr Sparman managed to learn, by dint of delicate diplomacy, that if he chose to muster courage enough to ask Helen Brinkhurst to marry him she would probably consent. So he summoned the necessary resolution, put the question, and was made happier by the answer than he had ever before been.

When he returned from his short wedding tour, the parishioners of St. Sheeroph hardly knew him for the same man; all the lines of his hitherto ascetic-looking face seemed to incline upwards instead of downwards, as they had hitherto tended.

The happy pair had rather less than the usual number of matrimonial tiffs,

and the Rev. Richard Sparman, never regretted having changed from a priest to a parson.

LONDON :

CHARLES F. ADAMS, PRINTER, BREWHOUSE YARD,
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